

Faith and Reason

By Dan Jensen (2024)

(In order to fully benefit from this essay, I recommend reading through my “works for beginners” first. I also highly recommend first reading my “Education and Evangelicals” as well. All of these can be found on my website.)

Introduction

It is very common to hear in the world of American pop-Fundamentalist Atheism¹ online (especially YT) that Christians only go by faith while they go by reason, logic, rationality, and facts. Most often, the ignorant but highly arrogant Atheist unknowingly defines *faith* as *credulity*. He or she in the overwhelming vast majority of cases knows nearly nothing about church history and the fact that the true church has historically always repudiated credulity. When I point this out to many of them, they become quite incredulous. They usually point me to some modern dictionary definition of *faith*, which has nothing to do whatsoever with how the term is used in the Bible and throughout the historic church.

There are exceptions to this on the ignorant front. Some, like Richard C Miller, are quite knowledgeable as scholars about the Bible, theology, and church history. That does not change the fact that many, *especially* Miller, are wildly arrogant and dishonest. Miller repeatedly and overtly misrepresents the biblical data and the early church on this matter in his interviews on the MythVision Podcast (YT). All of his interviews with Derek (the host of this podcast) can easily be found over there on YT. I have personally informally debated with him in the comments section on this channel more than once and when he is called out for his errors, he always changes the subject. The man

¹ For more on how I define this term and the way many Atheists and Progressive Christians (among countless others) repeatedly and often knowingly misuse the term *fundamentalist*, see my *All That's Wrong with Jonah*, pages 6-7 (it can be found on my website under the label “Response to Jonah Conner”), and my *The Idolatry of Progressive Christianity: A Response to Randal Rauser*, the section titled “My Experience with PC,” starting on page 24 (it can also be found on my website).

literally can *never* stay on topic and loves to tell you about all that he has read (as if that is relevant).

On one occasion I plainly explained to him that his definition of faith is clearly not how the term is used in the Bible. I pointed out to him that the term almost always means trust based upon evidence. I said that he can question the evidence all he wants, but that is generally how the term is used in Scripture, especially the NT. I said that I was happy to have a debate with him about that evidence, but that it was important to first admit that he was misrepresenting the biblical witness very badly. He refused to do that and went right after the evidence (again the man cannot stay on topic). He basically said that Abraham's faith was not based on any evidence, but only showed that he must have been crazy. At the end of the day, despite all the bluster from the pop-Fundamentalist Atheist apologists, they always merely assume their anti-supernatural Empiricism and refuse to ever look at anything from any different angle or answer the many very serious objections that can be leveled against that very weak philosophy.

Therefore, the purpose of this essay is to answer this pervasive misconception and/or misrepresentation from the pop-Fundamentalist Atheist community. I will first lay out my position on this matter while explaining how there has been some nuance on this point of doctrine throughout church history. I will then defend my view and the general view of the church over the course of the rest of the essay.

My Position

It is my position that the concept of faith in the Bible rarely solely refers to intellectual belief. It includes that, and sometimes does refer to it in that exclusive sense, but for the most part the concept refers to trust. So, for instance, I can believe that a chair exists and that it is capable of holding me if I sit in it. That does not mean that I am actually going to sit in it. I may not want to sit in it for whatever reason. But, if I do sit in it, I am

placing my trust in that chair to hold me up. I do not merely intellectually believe that it can hold me up, I am actually now trusting in it to do so.

Some have tried to say that this is a distinction without a difference. They say that if you sit in the chair and thus trust it to hold you up, it is because you intellectually believe that it will hold you up. And that if you choose not to sit in the chair it is because you don't believe it can hold you up. That is the very reason why you don't want to sit in the chair; it is because you don't actually trust that it can hold you up. Or, they will say, that if you desire not to sit in the chair for some other reason, it is not because you don't trust the chair to hold you up, it is for that other reason. There is some truth in this. I agree that if you intellectually believe that the chair can hold you up, you also on some level trust that it will do so if you were to sit in it. The point of this distinction is merely to say that there is a clear difference between intellectually believing that the chair can hold you up, and actually sitting in the chair. Thus, we can distinguish between implicit trust and active trust. Faith in the Bible almost always refers to active trust.

Let's take another example. Let us say that you are dangling from a cliff like we so often see in movies. One would honestly think this is a regular occurrence in real life, it so often happens in the movies. This is of course not the case, but because of the movies, it should be a familiar example to most in our culture. Let us say that you are not holding on to the very top of the cliff, but managed to grab onto a rock slightly down from the very top of the cliff as you were first falling down. And let us say that someone comes and reaches out his or her hand to pull you up. He or she cannot grab you because he or she cannot reach that far down. But, if you swing your weight and reach up towards him or her with your free hand, the two of you would be able to connect and he or she could pull you up. If you believe that he or she is more than capable of doing this, you have intellectual belief and implicit trust in this person. With that made clear, you may resent this person and may not want him or her to get credit for saving you. So, you hesitate. As long as you are in this state of hesitation, you only have intellectual belief and implicit trust. It is only when you reach out your free hand and allow him or her to pull you up that you have exercised active trust or belief/faith.

With all of that laid out, there are still further distinctions to be made. Saving faith is the act whereby we freely accept the free and entirely gracious gift of God's salvation offered to us. God's salvation primarily consists in Him saving us from the penalty and power of sin. However, not all acts of faith entail merely receiving something from God as a free gift. Sometimes, God may ask us to do a specific work in order to receive a blessing from Him. For instance, God calls us to follow His commandments, and if we do so with the help of the Holy Spirit (imperfectly of course as we always have our sinful nature within us as believers), He has promised to reward us for such actions. We must accept this promise by faith and act upon it. This is very different from what takes place in saving faith. When we do our good works in faith, we are still doing good works. Faith is present at every turn, but we are trusting in God to reward us for these good works. These rewards are not given to us as a purely free gift. But, we must have faith at every point that God will reward us for these works if we are to do them in the manner in which God wants us to do them.

When the Bible talks about saving faith, it means it in the sense of merely trusting in God to give you the free gift of salvation. It is apart from all good works and reward. It is only a gift. Let us return to the cliff analogy for a moment. Let us say that the person reaching out to you cannot pull you up on his or her own. Let us say that this person tells you to reach out your arm. You do so. He or she grabs your arm, but now tells you to help him or her pull you up by walking up the cliff with your feet as he or she pulls you up. At that point you must continue to trust this person, both implicitly and actively. Further, you must continue to trust this person in both aspects throughout the entire process of being lifted up onto solid ground again. However, this process is very different than if you merely lifted up your hand and this person lifted you up. In that case, you are merely freely receiving his or her offer of help. Once you do that, he or she does the rest. Saving faith is like the example of where you only reach up your hand.

Now, many will object that even when we lift up our hand, we are still doing something. That act is still a work. I agree, but this is where a lot of misconceptions come about with the concept of saving faith. Saving faith is a work. It is an action. You are doing something. What makes it so unique is that it is a single, momentary act, and that you are doing it in order to receive a free gift. All other actions that we do will be either rewarded or punished by God. Even when we receive free gifts in other areas of our life from God, God will still reward us separately for doing the right thing in receiving His promised gift. This is not the case with saving faith. Saving faith is a good and holy act. But, God will not reward it because it alone is not enough to earn our salvation. It is not that holy and good. And all other godly acts that we do subsequently as Christians, God is only rewarding us for them as our loving Father. They are not perfect works and so He does not have to reward us for them. But, He freely chooses to do so. Saving faith is not of works in the sense that we do not have to do a number of works (plural) in order to receive God's free gift of salvation. We only have to do this one solitary act. And it is a receptive act. We are receiving a free gift.

Now, this does not mean that other acts will not accompany saving faith. Again, there is also a lot of confusion on this point as well. For instance, the act of breathing will normally accompany saving faith. It is true that this is normally an involuntary act, but there is still a sense in which we are choosing not to stop this act throughout the day. Yes, we normally make this choice all throughout the day somewhat unconsciously, but we are still implicitly making that choice at every moment throughout the day. This is because we can always choose to hold our breath, as we all know. Normally, a person does not choose to hold his or her breath when he or she receives Jesus for salvation. However, he or she may in fact choose to do this. Maybe, this person has the habit of holding his or her breath for a moment whenever making huge decisions. If that is the case, then this act is accompanying saving faith for this unique person. The point in all this is to say that none of these accompanying acts have any bearing on the saving faith itself. God does not accept us because of our faith and these other accompanying acts.

This is especially important regarding the accompanying act of repentance. Technically speaking, repentance must come logically before the moment of saving faith. But, God does not save us by our repentance and faith. He only saves us because of our saving faith whereby we receive the free offer of salvation. With that made clear, it is impossible to place saving faith in God until one has made the decision to turn from his or her sins unto God for salvation. Let us again go back to the cliff analogy. You must first intellectually believe that this person can pull you up. Then you must make the decision to actually reach up your arm. You are saying to yourself that you no longer want to hang like this and that you wish to be saved. And then you reach up your arm. However, it is only the act of reaching up your arm that saves you. It is only when you make that action that the person then pulls you up.

We do not even have to use any words when receiving the free gift of salvation. It is often very helpful for people to use words, and this is why evangelists often recommend praying. But, technically speaking, if you sincerely in your heart alone receive the free gift of salvation from God, you will be saved. The same would be true with the cliff analogy. You may be talking to this person as all of this is going on. He or she may say, "Lift up your hand and I'll pull you up. You don't need to do anything else. If you just lift up your hand, I'll do the rest." You may respond, "I don't want you to save me. I can't stand you." The person may respond by saying, "That doesn't matter right now. Use your head and do what you need to do!" You may then say, "Fine(!)," as you lift up your hand. Saying the word *fine* as you lift up your hand is not what saves you even though the word is being said at the same moment you lift up your hand. Even though it accompanies the action of lifting up your hand, it is not what saves you. It is not even part of what saves you. It merely is accompanying the act of lifting up your hand. The act of lifting up your hand is what alone saves you.

Before moving forward, I should make it clear that the cliff analogy is not perfect. It is important to remember that no analogy is ever perfect. Obviously, when we receive Jesus, we never do so reluctantly or in anger. And the person reaching out to you in this analogy could not fully reach down to help you. This is why he or she needed you to lift

up your arm. God never needs our help for anything. God does not need our faith to save us. God could have unilaterally changed our natures into fully holy natures and forgiven us based upon the cross of Jesus Christ. But, God has chosen to use the method of faith so that we can have the wonderful experience of freely receiving what God has done on our behalf. Other shortcomings of the analogy could be provided, but hopefully you get the point.

Another area where key distinctions need to be made concerns the relationship between faith, reason, and knowledge. Again, there exists vast amounts of confusion over this topic, both within the church and outside of it. Faith, reason, and knowledge are all closely related topics, but they are not all the same thing. Reason has to do with logic, common sense, and instinct. Knowledge has to do with information. And faith has to do with trust, as we have seen. When we are little, people tell us not to hurt others. We don't really fully know this to be a correct moral principle in any absolute sense yet. We may have an inkling that this is the case, and some people may be more sensitive about hurting others because they don't like to see other beings getting hurt, but in most cases, children do not fully understand that this is an immutable and objective moral principle. Most believe in it because they are obeying the authority figures in their lives. Children have a very strong instinct to follow the authority figures in their lives, especially when good parents are present.

However, when we come to a certain age, we then know this to be a true moral principle beyond any doubt. Many may not have the desire to follow this principle, but they know it to be accurate. The information here is the content of the principle itself. Now that the teenager knows this principle to be true, it can be said that he or she possesses this knowledge. This teenager has not merely been given information as was the case when he or she was a child. He or she now knows that this information is true. He or she now has this knowledge. And the reason he or she now knows this is because his or her reason has instinctively made this abundantly clear to this teenager.

Where faith comes in is that this teenager can now either choose to trust in this knowledge, or he or she can choose to suppress it and pretend like he or she does not have it. This is where faith comes in. People often have the entirely mistaken notion that faith and reason, or faith and knowledge, are somehow divorced from each other. That simply is not the case. For example, many parents often choose to not believe all of the evidence against their child because they do not want to believe that their child could have possibly committed such a heinous act. It does not matter that the evidence is overwhelming, and that deep down they know the truth. They try to convince themselves otherwise. Thus, they have the knowledge that their child is guilty. This knowledge comes from both the information that is the evidence, and their reason that can see that the evidence is so overwhelming that their child must be guilty as charged. However, they choose not to believe this knowledge. Belief is always a choice. And people often choose not to believe that which they know deep down to be true.

With that made clear, sometimes parents cannot take the inner turmoil that this lack of belief causes when they know the truth deep down, and so they finally acquiesce to what they know to be true. This belief constitutes intellectual belief or implicit trust. They trust the evidence and their reason, and admit the knowledge that they already possessed. However, they may still not be able to do the right thing and confront their child about this. They may feel that it would be too painful, both for them and for their son or daughter. Therefore, they continue to outwardly pretend not to believe. They are not acting upon their belief.

Eventually though, in many cases, this tension will also be too much for many parents to bear. Hence, many will do the right thing and admit outwardly and publicly that their son or daughter is in fact guilty. This is active trust. They are trusting in their knowledge. They are trusting that it is better to be in line with the truth. When this is done, this act is in no way, shape, or form divorced from reason, knowledge, and intellectual belief. All three of those things must be present for active trust to take place. But that does not mean that active trust is any of those three things. Active faith can be said to include those three things, or that it must be accompanied by those three realities, but it is not

itself any of those three. Thus, when so many Atheists today try to define *faith* as being belief without evidence, they are engaging in woefully poor philosophy. It is so sad that even many dictionaries and textbooks often define faith in this manner. But, this is not how the concept is used by us as humans on a daily basis. And it is certainly not how the Bible uses the term or concept.

As one example, we may ask an Atheist if he or she believes that the earth is round. This is becoming more and more of a pertinent question in our day, unfortunately, because the flat earth movement is growing rapidly. And most Atheists will not hesitate to proudly proclaim, "Well, of course I do!" But, when they say this, they are not at all intending for anyone to understand them as trying to articulate the notion that they believe the earth is round apart from all evidence. They would be quite offended if we interpreted them that way, and rightfully so. We all understand that they are saying that they have made the correct choice to not only intellectually believe that the earth is round based on the evidence, but they also actively believe it in the sense that they would not hesitate to proclaim this belief when asked or when debating with those who seek to advocate for the incorrect and dangerous position that the earth is flat.

Now, it is true that some Atheists, trying to be more consistent with how they erroneously define *faith*, may say something more along the lines of, "I don't believe that the earth is round, I *know* it to be so." That is fine, but that is not how most people use the concept of faith. It is often used to describe things that we also know to be true. In fact, you will often hear Atheists themselves say things like, "I do not believe in fairy tales. I only believe in that which can be proven. I don't believe in the tooth fairy and all such nonsense. But, I do believe in science and history." When they talk like this, again, they are not saying that they believe that science and history exist without evidence. Quite the contrary, as the quote itself shows, they believe in those things because they know that the evidence overwhelmingly shows that those things are realities.

Now, it is true that we usually use the concept of faith to only describe certain things we know to be true that are controversial within a given society or group. Hence, in our

culture, for example, most people won't say that they believe in the existence of Joe Biden. We all know he exists, and almost no one denies this. However, if a group did come along and tried to deny this through some fangled conspiracy theory, then you would automatically hear many people saying that they fall into the camp that does believe in the existence of Joe Biden. And such language would be almost universally understood within our culture as people saying that they know that Joe Biden exists, and so they believe accordingly.

Another area where distinctions need to be made concerns faith and certainty. I have talked thus far a fair amount about belief that is based on knowledge. When this takes place, there is certitude in the belief. One is still choosing to do the right thing and believe, but this belief is based on knowledge that is certain. However, we also often use the concept of faith to refer to beliefs that we have that are not entirely certain. This is where I think a lot of Atheists and skeptics get really tripped up. They know that people often use the term in this manner, and so I think they get the impression that this is how religious people are always using the term or concept. But, this is not the case.

When we say we believe something without certain knowledge, this is known as *provisional* or *tentative belief*. Therefore, if I am convinced that the evidence for something is currently greater than the evidence for any of the opposing positions, the right thing is for me to say that I believe in the position that has the most evidence behind it. However, if that evidence does not rise to the level of providing me with absolutely certain knowledge, I must only maintain this belief provisionally or tentatively. This is because more evidence could come forth that could cause one of the other positions to now have more evidence behind it. And it might even be the case that one of the other positions may have so much new evidence brought forth on its behalf that we can be certain that this position is true. In that case, I would be under an even greater moral obligation to believe in that position, and to do so in the sense of certain belief, not provisional or tentative belief.

It is important to note though, that even provisional or tentative belief should never be chosen unless it is based on the evidence. Faith must still always be based on the evidence, whether it is provisional belief or certain belief. Provisional belief is merely where we understand that our current belief, based tentatively upon the available evidence as it currently stands, cannot be certain because the evidence does not yet rise to that level, and thus this belief could be overturned down the line. There is even a sense in which provisional belief still includes both reason and knowledge. We know that this provisional belief is the best and only moral choice for now based upon the evidence. And we come to that conclusion because of our reason. The difference is that this knowledge understands that this belief can only be tentative. Certain belief is based on concrete knowledge and the certainty that a given position is absolutely true because the evidence in favor of it is overwhelming.

It should also be said here that some provisional beliefs can be much stronger than others. They actually *should* be much stronger depending on the evidence. Sometimes the evidence in favor of one position is so strong, albeit not quite strong enough to call the position an absolute fact,² that our provisional belief in that position should be very, very strong. We can say that we believe in this position with a very high degree of certainty, even if not quite absolute certainty. With other positions though, we often have a very low degree of certainty. We can say that this position is stronger than all of the other countering positions, but that the evidence for all of the positions, including this one, is rather paltry.

In true Christianity, we are asked to believe in the essentials of the faith with certain belief, and we are asked to believe in the secondary doctrines of the faith with a provisional belief. I am of the opinion that whatever positions seem to have the most evidence behind them in the Bible as far as secondary doctrines go should be adopted by all Christians provisionally until we get to heaven. And those that have the strongest evidence behind them should be believed with a very high degree of certainty. Many theologians don't agree though. Many believe that if we do not have absolute certainty

² For more on how I define this concept, see my *The Idolatry of Progressive Christianity*, pages 50-52.

for a given doctrine biblically, extra-biblical evidence, whether philosophical or empirical, if strong enough, should lead us to take a position that has less biblical evidence behind it as long as that position is possible biblically. The only exception I make to this principle is if an absolute fact has been established from the extra-biblical evidence. In those cases, the Bible must be interpreted accordingly. We will discuss these points further down the line.

The final area where distinctions need to be made here concerns having direct knowledge of something vs. having indirect knowledge of something. If I am in terrible pain, I have direct knowledge of this pain. Even if it is psychosomatic for whatever reason, I am still experiencing this pain. And I am experiencing it directly. Thus, I have direct knowledge of this pain, as stated. However, when my children were very little, and one of them was in obvious pain, my knowledge of this pain was only indirect. I was not personally experiencing it. I was only witnessing what was taking place. But, that did not make my knowledge of it any less certain. As children get older, unfortunately, sometimes they will fake an illness or an injury for any number of reasons. Yet, when children are very, very little and are acting like they are in severe pain, they are plainly in actual severe pain. They do not fake such things.

This is extremely important because God often asks us as Christians to fully believe, with absolute certainty, many things that we have no direct knowledge about. God tells me in His word that when I die, I will be taken to heaven to be with Him forever. What a promise! But, I have no direct knowledge of heaven. I have never seen it or been there. I only have indirect knowledge of it from the Bible. As was said above though, this does not make my knowledge of heaven any less certain than much of my knowledge that is direct. I know with absolute certainty that the Bible is the word of God through the direct testimony of the Holy Spirit upon my soul. Therefore, whatever it teaches beyond all doubt is completely true. It teaches the doctrine of heaven that I outlined above beyond all doubt. Thus, that doctrine is absolutely true. Hence, I must as a true born again Christian believe that doctrine with complete certainty. And I do.

However, this fact is yet another biblical doctrine that many Atheists and skeptics often really get tripped up about. When they see the Bible commanding us to believe certain things, or talking about how we live by faith and not by sight, they say things along the lines of, "See, see! The Bible does command you Christians to just believe without evidence! And that is irrational!" They fundamentally do not understand what the Bible is driving at with such language. We believe many things we have never seen directly. I believe that Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. I know that this event occurred based on the overwhelming evidence that it did. But, I was not there to see that. And neither were you. I was not even born yet. And neither were you! I believe this not by sight, but by faith in the overwhelming evidence that this event actually occurred. And the vast majority of people also believe this for the same reason. This is all the Bible is talking about when it asks us to live by faith and not by sight.

The Bible talks about how God often gives to His people a great deal of evidence beyond the internal testimony of the Spirit. All of the heroes of the faith in the Bible were often given tremendous amounts of evidence for the truths of God outside of the testimony of the Spirit. Many saw some of the most spectacular miracles in all of history. And today, we have tons of evidence found outside of the Bible for the truths of the Bible. All of these pieces of evidence can greatly strengthen our faith. With that made clear, the ultimate evidence God has given us is the internal testimony of the Spirit. And many Christians down through the ages, and this may be you, have been given almost no evidence outside of the testimony. And this does not matter, as the testimony is more than enough. I understand how much most Atheists and skeptics hate this answer, but that does not matter. They do not get to tell God how He should do things.

With all of this laid out, let us now hone in on some specific key terms that are very pertinent to this discussion and provide some working definitions of them. These key terms are: reason; rationality; intellect; knowledge; faith; philosophy; logic; mystery; paradox; and contradiction. I understand that many, both today and in the past, have tried to make very sharp distinctions between reason, rationality, and intellect, but I do not. I use all 3 terms basically interchangeably. And I define *reason* as the capacity of

the mind (both our brains and souls working together) to receive information and interpret it instinctively according to the laws of logic. I believe the laws of logic are not merely human customs that help us understand the world and communicate with each other. I believe they are immutable principles that we all instinctively know to be true deep down. I believe that I have already adequately defined how I use the terms *knowledge* and *faith* thus far in this essay. I define *philosophy* as the study of the first principles of knowledge. I further lay out what all this entails in a basic sense in my book *A False Kind of Christianity*, in the chapter on philosophy. That work can be found on my website. I also define these following terms in that same chapter: *logic*; *mystery*; *paradox*; and *contradiction*.

With those basic definitions established, let us now look more closely at the doctrine of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. My understanding of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit is that as a result of regeneration, the sinner both hears God speaking in the Scriptures, and deeply desires to follow that voice. My understanding is that nothing magical takes place here. I firmly believe that even the unbeliever with an open mind can see that the Bible is the word of God. I understand that many theologians, especially many Reformed ones, will vehemently disagree with me there. But, the fact of the matter is that many unbelievers have testified over the years that they intellectually believe the Scriptures to be the word of God. One of my own sons falls into this category. The Puritans often talked about those like this in their churches and said that the best thing for such people to do is to continue to attend church as non-members in the hopes that God would be pleased to regenerate them. And I see nothing in Scripture that should preclude us from accepting the testimony of such people.

I understand that those in this category make up a very, very tiny minority among the unregenerate. That does not mean that they do not exist. With all of that made clear, they do not love God for His own sake. They may want to be saved in the sense of avoiding hell, but they have no true desire to love God for the sake of loving God. Many, like my son, will not choose to do the right thing and even attend church. They still hate God and His word. They cannot accept or hear His word in the sense of seeing its

loveliness. They may see its grandeur, but they cannot see it as being desirable in itself. I believe that all such passages such as 1 Cor 2:14 should be interpreted in this manner. I'm well aware of the fact that Paul is probably saying that the vast majority of the unregenerate will not accept the word of God even intellectually, but I believe that the full import of the passage is that the unregenerate can never fully accept the things of God in the sense that they can never ever see the intrinsic loveliness of them.

For most sinners, they will not even be open minded towards the Scriptures across the board leading up to the moment of regeneration. Now, they must be brought to a point where they have a true understanding of the gospel as I discuss in the second book to my "basics" series (page 62). That work can be found on my website. However, most of them would still not accept many things in Scripture, such as the command to wipe out the Canaanites. For most of the unregenerate, regeneration tears down this antipathy to the authority of God's word across the board. And for all of the regenerate (adults), God causes them to see the loveliness of the things of God across the board, and not just the truth and grandeur of the things of God, in the moment of regeneration.

This of course will not take place all at once for most of the regenerate. Please don't misunderstand me though. Regeneration does take place in a moment. My point is that many unbelievers have never even read or heard of huge swaths of Scripture when they are first saved. Unfortunately, for many varied reasons, many Christians both today and throughout the course of church history, will never read or hear all of the Scriptures in this lifetime. The key is that God will eventually, other than the rarest cases (such as a mental condition or a premature death), bring His children into orthodox churches where they will hear and read large portions of the Scriptures. In regeneration, they will gladly accept as from God whatever Scriptures they are familiar with, and will continue with this posture of acceptance throughout the rest of their lives concerning whatever Scriptures they become acquainted with after conversion. And by acceptance, I mean both accepting the truth and the loveliness of the word of God.

It is important to understand that the testimony of the Spirit is not some sixth sense. On this point almost all theologians are in agreement. It is only the process by which the Spirit removes the barrier to the obvious, namely that the Bible is the word of God and as such is deeply lovely and wonderful for us. It is not a revelation beyond the Scriptures themselves. With that made clear, it is extremely powerful because through it the believer knows beyond all doubt that not only is the Bible the word of God, but that it is now speaking to him or her as a child of God from his or her Heavenly Father who wrote it. This, in my estimation, is the full assurance that is spoken of in the Westminster Confession of Faith (chapter 1).³

This does not mean that the regenerate will be fully convinced of the inerrancy of the Bible right out the gate. There is a difference between hearing and understanding that the Scriptures are the voice of God in a broad and overarching sense, and deductively coming to the conclusion of the full doctrine of inerrancy from reading and hearing those Scriptures. It is improper to say that one could take any one sentence from the Bible, isolate it from its context, and read it aloud and everyone with an open mind (including the regenerate) would automatically know that this sentence came from the mind of God. The voice of God is only heard in the Scriptures when one is floored by the grandeur of large swaths of the Bible. Thus, in an initial sense it could have absolutely been the case that the Scriptures would have been the word of the Lord in an overall sense, with some errors scattered throughout. How this could have been the case is explained in my essays “Essay on Bible Difficulties” and “Practical Implications of Inerrancy.” Both of those pieces can be found on my website. But, we know from the Scriptures themselves that this is *not* how God chose to do things, and thus we must believe that. Thus, the reason the doctrine of inerrancy must be seen as an essential of the faith as I lay out in the second essay referenced above.

³ I understand that this assurance also has an intellectual component to it in the Confession. And I absolutely believe in that aspect. My take on that point has to do with my understanding of belief deep down vs. belief on the surface. For a further discussion on this point, please see my section on doubt in chapter 8 of my *A False Kind of Christianity*. I believe that even an unbeliever can know deep down beyond all doubt (only intellectually of course) that the Bible is the word of God. However, because he or she is unregenerate, he or she will constantly waffle on the surface. The believer however, will not constantly waffle, especially as he or she matures in his or her walk with the Lord over the years. I believe that this is also a crucial part of our full assurance as true Christians and that is how I interpret the Confession at this juncture.

With all of that made clear, it should be clear by now that nothing I say in this essay should ever be construed as me taking away from the internal testimony of the Spirit one iota. I am no rationalist. Yes, I believe that the truthfulness of the Bible can be proven rationally in a manner of speaking, but I utterly reject any notion that the unregenerate can ever accept the loveliness of the word of God without regeneration. I further just as strenuously reject any notion that anyone could ever come to the higher truths of the Bible through reason alone. Scripture is not merely a short cut to the fullness of knowledge. Reason can show us that the Bible is the word of God because of its grandeur in the manner in which I discuss at length in my *A False Kind of Christianity* (chapters 4 and 5), but it is only through the concentrated reading and study of that word that we can then fully understand and know the higher truths from God. As one example, reason can tell us that God is one and that He is plural as I lay out in my essay on the moral argument. That essay can be found on my website. Reason, as stated above, can also tell us that the Bible is the word of God. But, it is only when we carefully read and study that word that we can come to the full doctrine of the Trinity. Reason alone can never ever tell us that God is three persons.

This is why one often hears theologians from many different stripes down through the ages talking about how the higher truths of special revelation are above reason. I fully agree with this language and sentiment. The higher truths of special revelation can never be contrary to reason, but they are above it in the sense that reason alone could never provide these truths to us. Reason can point us in the right direction whereby we can find those higher truths, but again, it can never by itself give us those sublime realities.

With my doctrine on the testimony of the Spirit explicated, let us now turn to the important topic of worldview. I am a staunch proponent of the concept of *biblical worldview*. Unfortunately, many of my fellow orthodox theologians, including countless Reformed ones, say that I have too high a doctrine of general revelation for me to be able to hold to the concept of biblical worldview in any consistent manner. I heartily

disagree. Therefore, it is incumbent upon me to now dissect my doctrine of general revelation so as to be able to better explain where I am coming from on this issue. The basics of my doctrine on this point can be found in chapter 5 of my *A False Kind of Christianity*. I have also said many things in some of my other works that very much touch upon my doctrine of general revelation (most notably in “The Errors of Tony Jones;” *All That’s Wrong With Jonah*; and *The Idolatry of Progressive Christianity*; all of these works can be found on my website). Therefore, for the purposes of this essay, I need to further expound upon what I have said and clarify some key points.

The first item I need to address is the fact that it may seem that I give too much credence to general revelation because I believe that the truths of general revelation are every bit as true and binding upon us as the truths of special revelation. I am a strong proponent of the doctrine that all truth is God’s truth. I do not like the language of God’s “two books” for reasons I will explain momentarily, but I do absolutely believe that general revelation gives us very real and accurate revelation from God. The reason my doctrine makes some nervous is because in their minds it can seem that it places general revelation too closely to special revelation. And for many, this seems to contradict the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. I believe that I have already answered this in the main in the section on *sola scriptura* in chapter 7 of my *A False Kind of Christianity*.

To that section I would add the fact that it is extremely important for me to emphasize and reiterate that general revelation can never give us the higher truths we need from God. That right there makes it on a far, far lower plane than special revelation. Further, I don’t like the language of two books because general revelation should never be called the word of God. Only special revelation is the word of God. God does not use words when speaking to us through general revelation. General revelation is more akin to how we speak to each other through body language. Even further, the vehicle of general revelation, namely God’s creation, is not infallible. This is one of the starkest differences between how God went about giving us general revelation vs. special revelation. The creation would have been an infallible vehicle for general revelation had we not fallen, but it is no longer that post-fall. This does not mean that it does not give us true

information though. How this is the case is very similar to how I have described how God could have gone about giving us His special revelation through His fallible prophets if that is how He wanted to do things. I have described this in detail in a number of my works, but especially in the section on the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture in chapter 7 of my *A False Kind of Christianity*.

On top of all of this, it must be noted that general revelation almost always only gives us enough information to make very tentative conclusions based upon the empirical data. While we often have a plethora of empirical data for many things, it is almost always the case that we do not have enough to assert something as an absolute fact. Other than the first principles of knowledge, conclusions from mathematics, and a few items from the empirical realm, we for the most part can only come to tentative conclusions on most matters. Now, for many items we can have a much, much higher degree of confidence than for many other items. But, even in most of those cases our conclusions must still be tentative even if only in the sense that we cannot be absolutely dogmatic about them. This is not the case with special revelation. While there are plenty of doctrines that are secondary in nature, most of what the Bible teaches, emphasizes, and repeats in a myriad of creative ways are the essential doctrines of our faith. Thus, my doctrine rightly places general revelation well below the grandeur of special revelation.

Despite all this, many still are nervous about my doctrine and the doctrine of the many theologians that have similar approaches to general revelation, because they assert that special revelation should always interpret general revelation and it should never be the other way around. They say that my doctrine does not seem to agree with that assertion. It does not. With that readily admitted, I absolutely do believe that special revelation should *for the most part* be used to interpret general revelation, especially the vast majority of the empirical data found outside of the Bible.

The correct doctrine on this point in my estimation is not an either/or approach. The Bible must at the very least be interpreted by some common sense general revelation

principles or we could never read it in the first place. No language is so wooden that it does not require the use of the law of noncontradiction and basic common sense. Theologians who try to pretend that they never use general revelation to interpret special revelation are not being honest with themselves. With that point firmly in place, I assert that we must interpret the Bible according to the first principles of knowledge and all absolute facts that can be gleaned from the empirical world. We can also use the strong, albeit tentative, conclusions that have been reached by most scholars from the empirical world as an aid in our interpretations. However, we can never be dogmatic about these points.

With that made clear, for the most part, special revelation is to interpret general revelation. The world is an extremely messy place post-fall. We are finite, sinful beings living in a chaotic existence. As stated, even most of our conclusions based upon the empirical data can only be provisional. Further, general revelation only reveals to us the most basic principles concerning morality. Therefore, in order to make sense of this world, we must use special revelation to interpret general revelation for the most part.

This is where my earlier discussion of worldview ties in. We are never to look at the world as the truths from general revelation and the truths from special revelation are standing side by side the way many of the two book theologians assert. There is a glimmer of truth to this if we are only talking about the first principles of knowledge and absolute empirical facts, but it is not the case that general revelation merely gives to us the lower truths and special revelation gives to us the higher truths. While it is in fact true that general revelation gives to us the lower truths and special revelation gives us the higher truths, it is also the case that we must interpret the vast majority of the empirical data through the lens of special revelation. We must also fill out our moral code from special revelation. And that filling out does not solely constitute the reception of certain higher truths. It establishes how we are to approach the world on a daily basis and how we are to interpret human behavior. When we do this, we come to a comprehensive and biblical worldview.

Before moving to the next topic, there are two more objections to my understanding of the relationship between general revelation and special revelation that need to be addressed. The first has to do with the fact that as Conservative Evangelicals we rightly assert that the Bible, and the Bible alone, is the foundation for all Christian doctrines. Many believe though, that my doctrine seems to compromise this core truth. It does not. While we can know certain truths from general revelation, no fully orbed doctrine on any point can be established from general revelation. Even being able to assert the basic attributes of God from general revelation, as I absolutely believe we can do (see my discussion on “Perfection” in chapter 5 of my *A False Kind of Christianity*; see also Rom 1:18-20), still does not in any instance give us a fully orbed doctrine of the attributes of God on the whole, or any single attribute taken alone. For instance, we can only understand the full attribute of God’s justice when we understand the doctrine of hell. And that doctrine can only come from Scripture. Or, as another example, we can only fully understand the plurality of God when we understand that God is 3 persons. This doctrine also can only come from Scripture.

The next item I would like to address is the fact that I have correctly stated in some of my other works that in spite of the fact that I am very confident in my overall apologetic approach, I am not entirely dogmatic about it as I am concerning the essential doctrines of the faith. I have made it clear that even if the overall extra-biblical evidence were against me, I would still cling to the word of God based upon the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. However, I have not fully fleshed this point out and so confusion may result from my other presentations. I wish to clear this up here. First, I am not suggesting that the Bible could ever contradict any first principle of knowledge or absolute fact. You may ask, “Ok, but what if that did indeed happen? What would you do then?” It has never happened and I know that it never will. The hardened Atheist and others can retort that if it ever did, I would be in serious trouble. We can go back and forth about hypotheticals all day, but until it “does” happen, this is a moot point.

Second, I am not suggesting, as I have said elsewhere, that all objectivity would need to be lost. The Christian faith would still be objectively established based upon the

grandeur of the word of God. My point is that if that is all we had to go on, that would be that. I understand that this would make things far easier for the unbeliever to reject, but I could not control that in such a scenario. And as I've also said elsewhere, we would still need to interpret the Scriptures in the most objective and common sense ways possible. Further, we would need to answer all objections to the orthodox interpretations in the most objective ways possible (thus some basic form of apologetics would still be required). My point is merely that if the theistic proofs, especially the moral argument, were not as strong as I believe them to be today, and if the philosophical arguments against the faith were much stronger than I also believe to be the case today (albeit not dispositive against the faith), and almost all of the empirical data were against us (again not to the point of any absolute fact being established against the faith), I would admit this whether anyone wants to believe that or not. I am committed to going wherever the evidence directs us. That is how I was raised and I believe that this must be a general revelation maxim.

The second objection to my doctrine of general revelation that needs to be unpacked has to do with my firm belief that general revelation must, to some extent, interpret special revelation. Where dogmatic conclusions cannot be reached on a given topic from the extra-biblical data, we should tread very carefully here. With that made clear, if we are dealing with a secondary doctrine, the biblical evidence in favor of this doctrine is decidedly weak, the extra-biblical evidence against this doctrine is extremely strong, and the doctrine does not possess great theological importance, I am of the strong opinion that we must in those instances be open to changing our minds. This is essentially what took place with the Copernicus and Galileo controversies. The church was wrong to be so committed to the older position. However, when the extra-biblical evidence does not rise to the level of forcing us to come to dogmatic conclusions on certain points, the biblical evidence is very strongly against those points, and the doctrine in question does possess tremendous theological weight (even if it does not rise to the level of an essential), I am also of the firm position that in such instances we should not change our positions. This is why I am a passionate advocate of the young

earth doctrine even if the extra-biblical evidence against it is as strong as the secular scientists say that it is.

I further believe that if the extra-biblical evidence rises to the level of incontrovertible fact (and these instances are rare), we must interpret the Bible accordingly. And, as stated, I do not believe that there will ever be any conflict between such absolute facts and the essential doctrines of the faith. I do, however, believe that on the rarest of occasions, such facts can overturn secondary doctrines. I believe this eventually was the case with the Copernican theory. It eventually became obvious it was no longer a theory and the church had little choice but to accept it. I still believe the church should have changed its position sooner even when it was in its theory stage for the reasons I have already elucidated. With that made clear, I think that when it comes to absolute facts, we must interpret secondary doctrines accordingly even when there is strong biblical evidence in favor of them and they have a high degree of theological weight behind them.

With all of this made plain, the objection is that this renders the church uncertain about many doctrines because we often have to wait for the fullness of general revelation to unfold. This is only partially true. It is only true concerning secondary doctrines. It is never ever the case with the essentials of the faith. And we have to be ok with some degree, however small, of uncertainty when it comes to all of the secondary doctrines of the faith, no matter how important any secondary doctrine may seem to be. We should always be developing theologically to one degree or another concerning all secondary doctrines in the church. We will never have arrived on this front until Jesus returns. And if God uses His general revelation to fully clarify a point or to better move us in the right direction on a point, He is certainly free to do so.

The last thing I wish to discuss in this section is the fact that there has been a lot of nuance on the doctrine of the relationship between faith and reason in the church down through the ages. I am not saying that my position is *the* position of the Bible, and thus of the true church. What I am saying is that the church has always maintained that faith

can never be entirely divorced from reason and knowledge, and my position certainly falls within that basic essential framework. Hence, what I wish to do now is discuss some of this nuance before fully defending my particular position.

I have already discussed some of the most rudimentary differences that have existed within the church over the past 2K years in both my *A False Kind of Christianity* (in the section on doubt) and in my *The Idolatry of Progressive Christianity* (pages 160-161). Countless other fine nuances could be unraveled concerning the position of many eminent theologians down through the ages on this particular point. That obviously is well beyond the scope of this essay. With that said, we can look at a couple other examples. The Reformers, most especially Luther, often disparaged naked reason. However, they (even Luther) were still always careful to say that reason had its role in the church. At the very least, they said one had to use reason to interpret the Bible consistently.

They were viscerally opposed, for the most part, by the idea that reason alone could point us to special revelation. They did not only correctly say that reason alone can never provide us with special revelation, something that all orthodox theologians have stringently maintained, but they also said that it could not even point us to it. Most theologians throughout the history of the church, myself very much included, have not been willing to go this far. And I believe their error on this point paved the way for the later heresies of Barth. Calvin did say that reason could provide us with ample evidence for special revelation, but that this evidence could never be sufficient to point us towards special revelation. Their doctrine of the testimony, a doctrine that is shared by far too many Reformed theologians to this day, unfortunately in my estimation, was that unbelievers could never see that the Bible is the word of God even from a purely intellectual point of view.

With all that made clear, they knew nothing of any notion that faith is not based upon concrete knowledge. In fact, they took such a strong stance on the assurance of faith that they basically equated this assurance with the very definition of saving faith itself.

Most Protestant theologians, even the most Reformed, have admitted that this was too strong. I do believe that the assurance of faith is part of the definition of faith. But, I maintain that this only refers to the fact that we can know the truth of special revelation beyond all doubt deep down, that we can know that we are truly saved deep down, that this assurance will cause the believer to waver less and less throughout his or her journey with Christ on the surface, and that the basic definition of saving faith from the biblical witness is that of trust in Christ alone for salvation from the penalty and power of sin.

What is very important about all of this is that they would have blasted someone like Miller with all the ferocity they could muster regarding his notion that the church only calls people to have faith and not knowledge. Now, Miller, to my knowledge, mostly harps on the earliest days of the church here. I'm not aware of how cognizant he is of the doctrine of the Reformers or any of the later theologians on this point. Either way, he is wrong about the infant church, as we will discuss later. And it is important to note here that the constant refrain of so many ignorant Atheists today would have no place in the thought of the Reformers. For the Reformers, God gave to the believer certain knowledge that the Scriptures came from God and caused them to place their faith in these Scriptures in the act of saving faith. They did not say that the believer places his or her faith in Scripture apart from Christ, or in the Scriptures in a primary sense. They said that the believer places his or her faith in Christ alone as He speaks through the Scriptures alone. All of this took place the moment God changed the believer's heart in the first moment of salvation.

It is far beyond the scope of this essay to fully document this. For further resources on these points, I point the reader to my extensive bibliography at the end of my *A False Kind of Christianity*. One can also read *The Bondage of the Will* by Luther, and just Book 1 of the *Institutes* by Calvin to get a solid grasp of the 2 most prominent Reformers on this point. Both of those works are now available for free online. A simple Google search brings either of them up quickly.

Moving a little further back in church history, Aquinas most certainly did not see faith as somehow divorced from concrete knowledge. He writes, “Whereas man’s whole salvation, which is in God, depends upon the *knowledge* of this truth. Therefore...., it was necessary that [man] should be taught divine truths by divine revelation (emphasis mine).”⁴ Aquinas was also hardly against reason. In fact, he is often thought (even by far too many orthodox theologians unfortunately) to have a far, far stronger doctrine of reason than he actually did. Nevertheless, no one would ever question the fact that Aquinas had a very, very high view of reason. But, far from any notion that knowledge comes from reason while we merely have to believe God’s special revelation, Aquinas taught the exact opposite.

He writes, “Hence sacred doctrine makes use also of the authority of philosophers in those questions in which they were able to know the truth by natural reason.... Nevertheless, sacred doctrine makes use of these authorities as extrinsic and probable arguments; but properly uses the authority of the canonical Scriptures as an incontrovertible proof, and the authority of the doctors of the Church as one that may properly be used, yet merely as probable. For our faith rests upon the revelation made to the apostles and prophets who wrote the canonical books, and not on the revelations (if any such there are) made to the doctors.”⁵

Thus it is plain that Aquinas never put Aristotle or Augustine on the same plane as the divine Scriptures. This is not to say that Aquinas did not believe that certain truths of reason could be known with certainty. His writings make it very evident that he did believe this. His point here is that no individual after the closing of the canon could ever be considered infallible. And no writer outside of the faith, such as Aristotle, could ever be considered infallible either. We can only come to the truths of reason in a certain sense by reasoning to them ourselves. The great philosophers, especially Aristotle, can absolutely greatly aid us in this endeavor, but they alone cannot give to us dogmatic proclamations.

⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.1.1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.1.8.

However, when the Scriptures speak, they are to be immediately believed because of their intrinsic authority. They, in themselves, provide us with incontrovertible proof. What is so important for the purposes of this essay is that the Scriptures are not to be seen, according to Aquinas, as merely giving us naked information that must be uncritically believed; on the contrary, they give to us incontrovertible proofs that provide us with the knowledge of divine revelation. And Aquinas pounds home throughout the first section of the first part of the *Summa*, that this knowledge is above and beyond the knowledge that comes to us through reason alone. This is also reiterated throughout all of the rest of his works, including the rest of the *Summa* itself.

Now, to be clear, Aquinas does carefully distinguish the nature of faith itself from the nature of coming to the truths of reason.⁶ But, this in no way means that he is saying that the knowledge of faith is not real knowledge. That it is a bare belief without any foundation whatsoever. That is entirely foreign to the thought of Aquinas.

Finally, as was the case with almost all medieval theologians, Aquinas did not have a developed doctrine of the testimony of the Spirit. However, the seeds of this doctrine can certainly be found in him. In fact, in line with Augustine, he would have been far closer to the Reformers and all later Protestants on this point than most medieval theologians.⁷ And my doctrine that even unbelievers can see the truth of God's word if they approach the Bible with an open mind from a purely intellectual point of view is far closer to that of Aquinas than would be the position of many orthodox Protestant theologians, including many Reformed ones.

With it established that I am in no way saying that the church has been monolithic in its understanding of the precise nuances concerning the doctrine of the relationship between faith and reason, we can now move to my defense of my particular doctrine that is plainly within the boundaries of historic orthodoxy. We will do so over the course

⁶ Ibid., 2-2.2.1.

⁷ Ibid., 2-2.1.

of the next three sections. We will look at philosophical considerations, biblical considerations, and then finally, church history considerations. After this is completed, we will then hone in on two other very important subjects that highly pertain to the doctrine of faith and reason. Those will be examined in the final two sections of this essay.

Philosophical Considerations

I believe that everything of a philosophical nature that I have stated as part of my position on this point is philosophically sound. I believe everything is in keeping with common sense, or has been adequately defended in my chapter on philosophy in my *A False Kind of Christianity* or the other works I have already referred the reader towards in this essay thus far, or will be defended later in this work. If anyone wishes to challenge this assertion, he or she can do so by emailing me. I will happily answer the charge and you have my full permission to publish or post our email correspondence. My email can be found on my website.

Before moving to the next section, I do want to really reiterate and pound home that I fully agree with the bulk of the Atheists that credulity is unacceptable and is in no way philosophically sound. I reject it outright. All orthodox theologians for the past 2K years have done so as well. All true orthodox Christians do so as well, at least implicitly. What I mean by implicitly is that many may not understand all of the issues involved, but once they were sufficiently explained to any true believer, he or she would agree that credulity is not a sound thing for anyone to embrace. Faith can never be divorced from evidence, reason, and knowledge. With that made clear, not all evidence is empirical in nature. To say that it is, is to assert a self-defeating statement. And I will have much more to say about Empiricism later in this essay.

Biblical Considerations

The primary Greek word used in the New Testament for faith is *pistis*. It is used 243 times throughout the NT. There is no question that the root etymology of the word essentially meant *to believe*. There is further no question that the word could be used at times to refer to naked belief apart from evidence, or credulity. However, the notion that this can be its only monolithic import is plainly false. All words have a semantic range and this word is no different. Some of the key usages would include the following: faith; belief; trust; confidence; fidelity; faithfulness.⁸ As Blomberg states:

The Greek for “faith” is *pistis*, from the same root as *pisteuo*. If English had a verb, “to faith,” we would be more familiar with the linkage! As it is, neither “believe” nor “have faith” probably captures as much of the significance of the Greek word group as our English “trust” or “entrust.” Neither the Synoptic or Johannine Jesus is looking for followers who recite a series of creedal affirmations about him but for those who commit their lives to him in discipleship and trust that his death has atoning significance and that his resurrection guarantees theirs.⁹

While Blomberg is primarily focused here on the Gospels, it is clear from the New Testament as a whole that the chief way that the New Testament uses the idea of faith is in the sense of trust. Again, I am not in any way denying that other usages are present. They most certainly are. I would even grant that sometimes the word can be interpreted as having the import of credulity in the context. But, this is rarely the case. Even when the term is used to describe the purely intellectual faith of an unbeliever who nonetheless believes the content of the gospel, it hardly ever means it in the sense of credulity. Even these unbelievers usually believe in the content of the gospel based upon some evidence, such as a miracle or multiple miracles. With that in mind, let us look at some key evidence for the usage of the term in the sense of trust in Paul.

⁸ Bible Hub, s.v. “pistis,” accessed Jan 24, 2024, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4102.htm>.

⁹ Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament: Countering the Challenges to Evangelical Christian Beliefs* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), Kindle e-book, 198.

Romans 4 is absolutely pivotal in establishing the view of the Apostle on the nature of saving faith. Paul uses *pistis* 10 times in this chapter alone.¹⁰ And it is quite clear from verses 1-8, especially verses 4 and 5, that Paul does not see faith as credulity. He makes the contrast between working and receiving a gift. When one works for something, his or her wages are not a gift. They are what is due this person. However, when one freely receives a gift, the gift has not been earned, but is received by the gracious hand of the giver. Any notion of merely believing in the existence of the wages or gift is utterly foreign to the context here. If God had said that all we need to be saved is to believe in the existence of the person and work of Jesus, that would constitute fulfilling a requirement. That would fundamentally not be receiving the gospel as a free gift. Such would plainly constitute a work. That is obviously not what Paul has in mind here.

Now, one can object that actually receiving the gospel is a requirement from God, and is a work in a manner of speaking as discussed earlier in this essay. This is true. However, the nature of this requirement is entirely different than any other requirement. Reaching out the empty hand of faith and freely receiving a gift makes the essence of this requirement completely different than any other requirement. To believe in the content of the gospel is not the same thing as freely receiving a gift. It is to embrace the content of the gospel intellectually and nothing more. The notion that this is what Paul has in mind here cannot be justified exegetically, not to mention the fact that it would so blatantly contradict what he says elsewhere throughout his writings, including in this very epistle (see Romans 6 as one example). It is abundantly clear from both Paul and the rest of the New Testament, that saving faith means to trust in Christ alone to save one from both the penalty and the power of sin. It can only be received as a free gift. But, if one does not wish to be saved from the power of sin, then one is not genuinely trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation. The idea of a bare intellectual faith saving us cannot be made to mesh with the New Testament as a whole.

¹⁰ *Bible Hub*, s.v. "pistis," accessed Jan 24, 2024, https://biblehub.com/greek/strongs_4102.htm.

Paul was the chief theological interpreter of the Christian faith. And there is nothing in the rest of the entirety of the NT that can be brought forth as indisputable evidence for a contrary doctrine on the nature of saving faith. If anyone would like to challenge that assertion, it can be done by emailing me. I am happy to have that debate. You have my full permission to publish or post our correspondence as well.

Miller and others can of course interject at this point that this is all fair enough. But, they could say, this does not change the fact that trusting in Jesus in the manner described above would still require a person to believe in the content of the gospel as well. I would heartily agree. And, they could say, the New Testament still does not require people to believe in this content based upon any evidence. They could also say that this belief, even if hypothetically based on some evidence, would still not be the same as knowledge and reason. None of that follows. It is important to first establish that the term *pistis* is not normally, and certainly not in any chief sense, used to describe credulity in the New Testament. But, we can build on this fact. The New Testament does not advocate for the denial or watering down of reason.

All of the verses on general revelation and apologetics (Ps 19; Rom 1-2; Acts 17; 18:27-28; 19:8; 2 Cor 10:5; Phil 1:16; 1 Pet 3:15-16; and Jude 3) amply demonstrate this. General revelation plainly teaches us not to spurn reason and one cannot defend something apart from reason. Further, the Bible knows nothing of a disjunction between knowledge and faith. This can be proved by a mere small sampling of texts: Matt 9:6; Jn 21:24; Acts 3:16; Rom 7:14; 8:22; 28; 2 Cor 5:1; 1 Jn 3:2. The Greek word behind the word *know* in these texts is *eido*. It is used 319 times in the NT, and it is found all throughout the NT.¹¹ It is often used to describe the knowledge that believers have of the doctrines of the faith, including the essential ones. *Eido* is a very strong word. It connotes a fullness of knowledge or absolute knowledge. It can even mean to know something beyond doubt.¹²

¹¹ *Bible Hub*, s.v. “eido,” accessed Jan 25, 2024, https://biblehub.com/greek/strongs_1492.htm.

¹² *Sermon Index*, s.v. “eido,” accessed Jan 25, 2024, [https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=article&aid=34331#:~:text=Know%20\(1492\)%20](https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=article&aid=34331#:~:text=Know%20(1492)%20).

I understand that many of my fellow orthodox theologians will argue that the word does not carry such a strong meaning in the NT itself, but I see no reason to come to this conclusion and I believe that such a conclusion is not philosophically sound. I do not believe that God requires us to put our eternal destiny in the hands of probabilities, no matter how high those probabilities may be. With that made clear, I certainly do not believe that to take the softer view is heretical. And either way, the notion that the Bible, especially the NT, teaches credulity cannot be sustained in the light of the usage of this crucial word across its pages.

We can know the truths of God both intellectually and emotionally deep down beyond doubt through the internal testimony of the Spirit (the unbeliever can only know intellectually through the grandeur of the word of God). Extra-biblical evidence can be used to greatly strengthen our faith and knowledge, but it is not on the same plane as the word of God and the testimony of the Spirit (1 John 5:6-12).

Next, let us look a little more into the nature of extra-biblical evidence. Adam and Eve walked with God personally. They continued to converse with Him at times even after the fall. The same was true of Cain and Abel. God spoke to Abraham multiple times, He wrestled with Jacob, He performed mighty miracles especially through Moses, Elijah, and Elisha. Further, God made it clear that anyone who claimed to be a prophet had to give at least one explicit prophecy concerning the future that had to come true in order to confirm his or her status as a true prophet (Deut 18:15-22). The notion of credulity is altogether foreign to the OT witness. No Jew would have ever interpreted Heb 11 as teaching credulity in light of this fact. The faith that is spoken of throughout that chapter was based on solid evidence in every case. The testimony of the Spirit is more than enough for any true believer, but God almost always graciously gives to His people extra-biblical evidence beyond the testimony itself.

None of this extra-biblical evidence rises to the level of the testimony. At every juncture, someone could object that these supernatural events were being done by the forces of

evil. However, as supplement evidence, it is powerful indeed. This is why God also said to His people that if anyone claiming to be a prophet contradicts prior revelation, he or she has disqualified himself or herself irrespective of any miracles or prophecies he or she may provide (Deut 13). The word of God always takes precedence over all else.

When I pointed this out to Miller, he went on a rant about how if anyone came to us saying that he or she had heard from God, we should think that this individual is insane and should seek out help on his or her behalf. First of all, that was not the point I was originally trying to make. My original point was that no Jew would have interpreted Heb 11 in the manner he was exegeting it. I even told him that I was happy to discuss the nature of the extra-biblical evidence that is claimed to have been given in the OT, but that we should first stick to the exegesis of Heb 11. He did not want to do that. But, it was clear that he should have conceded my original point, but did not want to admit that, so he wandered off to a tangent as he is very prone to do when dialoguing with him.

Second, I should only think such a person is insane if I am presupposing Naturalism. This is what Naturalists constantly do in their argumentation. They presuppose Naturalism without making any attempts to establish that philosophy, and then all supernatural claims are swiftly escorted out of court in a mocking fashion. I am not going to play this game with the Naturalists. I don't presuppose Naturalism and I have very good philosophical reasons for not doing so. I fully agree that if some rando dude off the street came to me saying that he had spoken to God, I would be very skeptical. But, let's say my dad came to me and said this. I would take that very, very seriously. My father is a very credible person who has never made any claim like this before. I admit that I would probably initially be somewhat worried about his sanity, but if he seemed to be his normal self and was adamant, I would not dismiss that. Such would be an irrational thing to do given my long history with my father. If we had my father tested, and he came out with a clean bill of health, I would absolutely believe that a supernatural event had taken place. Now, as a cessationist, I would interpret this event according to my convictions. But, no, I would not dismiss it outright.

The same basic thing would have taken place with Abraham. He was a trusted member of the family. I have no doubt that his claims were initially met with a great deal of skepticism. However, once it had become clear to the family members that he was his normal self, his vehemence regarding his own veracity would have been taken quite seriously. Further, Abraham would have been more than confirmed in his claims once Sarah had started to show her pregnancy with Isaac. The idea that we have to read the narrative as Abraham was crazy is nothing more than Naturalist bias.

As far as the command from God to sacrifice Isaac goes, Abraham would have assuredly kept this to himself and this is in fact reflected in the Genesis record. Abraham knew that God was going to raise Isaac from the dead. God was testing Abraham to see if he would trust in God no matter what, and to see if Abraham would not make Isaac an idol in his life. This test was for the benefit of Abraham and not for God, who of course needs no such tests. The fact that Abraham knew this is implied in the Genesis narrative itself, and is made explicit for us in Heb 11.

Before launching into the next section, I would like to briefly discuss the nobility of faith. Many people, including true Christians, have the very mistaken notion that unless the content of our faith is less than absolutely certain, there can be nothing truly noble about it. There is no reason whatsoever to come to this conclusion. In fact, I would say that it is illogical to put our eternal destiny in the hands of anything that is not wholly certain. And I would say that to do anything illogical is a sin. The counter to this is to say that there is nothing difficult about believing in anything that we know to be true beyond doubt. I strenuously disagree. If we don't want something to be true on some level, this will always render belief in this something as difficult regardless of what our intellect knows to actually be the case.

We often ask people to trust us based on what they know. And while this is often a request for trust based on less than absolutely certain knowledge, many times people know certain things about us beyond doubt. My kids do not infallibly know my heart. I

would of course never say otherwise. However, they do know beyond doubt that I would never intentionally do anything that would cause them long term harm. Therefore, when I ask them to trust that I am giving my best advice about something, I expect that trust. This does not mean that I always expect them to listen to me. My advice may not be the best. But, I do expect them never to have any doubts about my motives when giving such advice. If any of them ever did, I would be deeply hurt and even somewhat angry on some level. Things are the same with God to a certain degree. We have no right to question Him when He has revealed Himself to us. And yet, in our sin, we do often question and doubt Him. That is precisely why faith is so noble and is so often highly praised throughout the Scriptures from beginning to end.

Now, again, this does not make faith into a meritorious work that is sufficient to save us as the grounds for our salvation. God only ever accepts perfection. Thus, only perfect faith that leads to perfect works that lead to the perfect fulfillment of all of God's commands could ever be accepted at the judgment bar of God as far as fulfilling the covenant of works. Saving faith is extremely noble and praiseworthy. But, due to our remaining sinful nature even after regeneration, it can never come close to rising to the level of perfection. What it can do is receive the salvation that Jesus has earned on our behalf as a free gift. And it can throughout our Christian lives cause us to trust in God more and more, leading to greater and greater sanctification, which will be rewarded at the final judgment from God as our Father (not as our Judge) through Jesus Christ.

Church History Considerations

It is far beyond the scope of this essay to give an adequate defense of the church's position on being against credulity. We have already seen some very strong evidence from Aquinas. Similar quotes could be given from all of the major Church Fathers. Augustine was especially against credulity. Miller tries to make a giant deal out of the fact that the early church called upon catechumens to simply believe and not to ascertain absolute knowledge. This is to badly misunderstand things. The church to this day calls upon people to believe and does not demand that they first confirm the truths

of the gospel through extra-biblical data before coming to Christ and being fully admitted to the church. Such would be a ridiculous requirement for the vast majority of people, especially in the ancient world. This in no way means that the church was asking people to blindly believe. While the doctrine of the testimony was very underdeveloped, it was always there in germ form. The church always understood that the Spirit convicted people of their sins and in the process showed to them that the gospel is from God. Not all evidence has to be empirical in nature. Not all knowledge comes solely from the empirical world.

And even if Miller could prove that the early church did advocate credulity (he could not because it did not, but for the sake of argument), all this would mean is that the church had apostatized very, very early on. The Scriptures, and *not* church history, are our ultimate authority as true Christians. If this was the case, then I would proceed as described in my *The Idolatry of Progressive Christianity* (pages 90-92; I also highly recommend reading all of the first 3 chapters of that work to fully understand where I stand on the relationship between Scripture and church history).

Empiricism

For further resources pertaining to this section, I recommend the section on philosophy in my bibliography at the end of my *A False Kind of Christianity*; my essay on my philosophy; and my essay on the moral argument. All of these works can be found on my website. I will not here be detailing the history and beliefs of Empiricists. It is presupposed that the reader has a thorough grasp on this philosophical school of thought, as well as all of the major philosophical schools of thought.

It is extremely common to hear Empiricists of all stripes, but especially Atheists, say that they only go by reason, knowledge, and the facts, while “religious” people go by faith. This mentality has been drilled into younger people in our culture. It causes immense arrogance in them. Many of them are practically drooling as they hear this sentiment because they so badly want to leave the religion of their parents. Religion of any stripe

has become about as uncool as anything in our culture right now, especially for those under 30. As far as Biblical Christianity in our nation goes, there is no question that we are in an age of rapid apostasy, in line with the rest of the West. The fact that the faith is spreading like wildfire in the poorer and non-Western parts of the world is largely ignored or even mocked, something that is decidedly racist in my book. The irony is that religious people, for the most part, and especially orthodox Christians, are being tacitly misrepresented.

Most knowledgeable Empiricists will readily admit that they know very little in an absolute sense. Most of the top Atheists do not hesitate to be quite transparent on this point. Dillahunty has made this very clear in many of his debates. I have heard Jonathan MS Pearce on more than one occasion say that according to the Atheist paradigm, we could all be brains in a vat. He admits that he and his fellow Atheists have to assume a lot when seeking to understand the world around them. One could even say that they take a lot on faith. Oh how upset they get when we say this! Bad Christian, bad Christian! They will shoot back that they take nothing on faith. Faith is blind belief, while they go by the evidence! Yes, they will say, it is true that they have to make certain assumptions about the world before they can even go about the business of examining the empirical data, but they say that these assumptions are eminently reasonable and are held to by almost all people. That is not the same thing as taking a blind leap of faith into the dark.

Again, as I've said countless times in many, many venues, they are assuming their Empiricism and their definition of faith. You almost never see them make any attempt to defend their Empiricism, either in a positive constructive sense, or in making any effort to answer the many very serious problems with this philosophical school of thought. Further, you almost never see them make any attempt to interact with the actual definitions of *faith* that are given by the various religious communities, and most certainly not with that given by historic Christianity. As we have seen, the Bible and the historic church do not define *faith* as credulity. And as we will see as we proceed in this section, Empiricism is not so self-evident as they assume.

Richard Dawkins, one of the most arrogant and ridiculous people on earth, has said over and over and OVER again, that we must always go with the evidence. It is rather obvious that he means solely the empirical evidence. This is the spirit of Empiricism. If something cannot be proven by the empirical data, it should not be entertained. The problem is, of course, that this principle itself cannot be proven through any empirical evidence. Many Empiricists will admit this, but say that it has to be our sole first principle. Why? Who says? Who made you the intellectual authority over me? Further, this position is untenable in the extreme. Countless other assumptions have to be made before one can go about trying to come to most conclusions from the empirical data. One has to assume a definition of *truth*. One has to assume the laws of logic. One has to assume that we are not living in a matrix world. One has to assume the basic reliability of our senses. One has to assume that when we have an overwhelming amount of empirical evidence for something, that this thing must almost assuredly be real, or true, or have taken place in the past. One has to assume that when we have very strong evidence for something, albeit not quite to the level of overwhelming evidence, that this something is probably real, or true, or took place. We can have a high degree of certainty regarding this conclusion.

Empiricists must assume a lot more than they let on. Many will reluctantly concede this. However, most will fire back that I have to assume the same things as well. But, I don't assume these things, I know that they are first principles of knowledge beyond all doubt. And I know that they infallibly come to me from God. Further, I don't know that merely because I am a Christian. All people know this deep down. Again, please see my discussion on all of this in the chapter on philosophy in my *A False Kind of Christianity*. The denial of any of these first principles is self-defeating. Most of them are necessary for any assertion. And one of the only exceptions to this rule is the fact that the perfect being exists. All people know this deep down instinctively, but I cannot prove that to those who wish to disingenuously say otherwise. However, the moral argument can be used to show the futility of denying this first principle of knowledge.

If I am nothing more than a brain in a vat, I can choose to believe whatever I want. If my entire reality is one giant deception, then why am I obligated to continue to entertain this false reality? If I want to believe that Biblical Christianity is true, who are you to say that I should not? Even if it is credulity, so what? Why is that worse than believing in Atheism? You cannot prove Atheism if I am a brain in a vat. You don't even actually exist if I'm a brain in a vat! Why should I then listen to anything that you, a fiction that is being infused into my brain, say about squat?! Again, I am not at all saying that this is how I actually approach my faith. I am saying that even if the Atheist definition of my faith were correct, why is that then grounds for me to give it up even from your perspective?

What Atheists and Empiricists so confidently assert as knowledge turns out to be nothing more than highly probable conclusions based on assumptions that they cannot prove and don't even know are absolutely correct in the first place. What seems so lofty to begin with turns out to be nothing more than a mirage upon closer inspection. I am the one that says that we can have actual real and concrete knowledge about many, many matters. I offer actual provable conclusions, the Atheist offers a brain in a vat.

Now, many more sane Empiricists will refuse to be as reductionist as Pearce. Pearce is far more consistent than they are, and we can appreciate that from him, but they understand how absurd his position actually is. They don't see that in order to avoid the plain conclusion of Pearce they need to abandon Empiricism altogether. So, let us examine the valiant attempts of these Empiricists.

Most of these will actually agree with most of what I said in my chapter on philosophy in my *A False Kind of Christianity*, spoken of above. They will of course disagree with my assertion about instinctively knowing that the perfect being exists, as well as many of the instincts I say that we have in connection with that knowledge and the intellectual consequences that must be derived from those particular first principles, but they will agree with most of the rest of what I say. They will then say that with those first principles of knowledge in place, we should then largely approach the world from an

Empiricist vantage point. They will admit that we can rarely make absolute conclusions from the empirical data, and that we need to be ok with this. But, they will say that we can have a very high degree of confidence for countless other conclusions from the empirical world. Finally, they will say that where the empirical data strongly points in a certain direction we should always lean in that direction until the data causes us to change course on that point because now the overall data strongly points in another direction.

The problem is that they are making groundless assumptions every bit as much as Pearce and his ilk are. First of all, where did we get all of the first principles of knowledge that they are willing to admit to the court as admissible? If God did not provide them, who or what did? If we merely evolved them, who says that they are then good or accurate? After all, the overwhelming bulk of humanity evolved the belief in God or “gods,” and they insist that this is an unfortunate holdover from our primitive past. Maybe all of these first principles of knowledge are such holdovers and we are again left with Pearce’s glorious vat. Many of these Empiricists will say that we cannot know where they came from, it is a mystery, and it is enough to know that we have them and that they are entirely true and reliable.

Fair enough, but this doesn’t answer why I should morally abide by them. If I want to eschew my intellect in favor of my credulity (again, not at all saying that this is how my faith works, simply for the sake of argument), who are these Empiricists to say that I shouldn’t do this? Many will say, “Go right ahead!” They don’t care if that is what I want to do and would appreciate my honesty on that front. But, we all know this isn’t the case. As soon as I start voting based on my credulity in ways that have very real effects on these Empiricists, they cry foul! As they should. The moral question cannot be avoided here.

So, again, I ask why I should go with my intellect if my faith makes me more happy? They will say that I should not do this because this would be selfish and would have very real effects upon other people. So what? Who says I have to care about other

people in this Empiricist framework? Many will say that if the only reason I seek to be altruistic is because of my faith, this makes me a horrible person. I have already answered this objection in my essay on the moral argument. I am not saying that this would ever actually be true of me. But, it would certainly be true of many people and who is to say that their lack of empathy is wrong? If they evolved this way, who are you to judge them for being this way when they cannot help being in this state? Sorry, but no brand of Empiricism works.

The Empiricist can no more avoid overarching philosophical questions and considerations than anyone else. And if the philosophical arguments point in the direction of Biblical Christianity, then that is that. All empirical data must be interpreted accordingly. This is nothing unreasonable either. So many ignorant people online hear arguments like this and think that we are asking them to deny facts and evidence in favor of abstract philosophical arguments. We are doing nothing of the sort. The philosophical arguments are based on common sense and cannot be dismissed. Further, most people don't understand how empirical data works in the first place. And most knowledgeable Empiricists know this and do nothing to correct this pervasive problem in our culture. They know that it would do them no favors to correct it. To be fair, many Christian apologists are basically quasi-Empiricists. This often leads to both sides pounding home the empirical evidence in favor of their positions, while ignoring the evidence against them. Usually, both sides end up talking past each other. Worse, in many cases, both sides will overly rely on fringe scholars or fringe positions to address the areas where the empirical data is decidedly against them so as to make it seem like almost all of the data across the board is in their favor.

The fact of the matter is that there exists no religion, worldview, philosophy, or paradigm that does not have ample amounts of empirical data working against it. This is reality my friends. It is far better if we would all be honest about this. I am in no way asking anyone to throw their intellect away. Far from it; I am one of the strongest advocates for the intellect among all Christian apologists. I am in no way asking anyone to deny any shred of empirical data. Where something, and this is truly rare, can be proven beyond all

doubt from the empirical data, this must be believed by all. No such conclusion has ever been shown to definitively contradict the Bible. Where the data on all probabilistic matters is in favor of Biblical Christianity, as so much of it is, awesome. Where it is not, we should be honest about that. In those cases, we can say that with more data, we would see the Bible to be vindicated on this particular point. And that is *not* a blind faith position. This has to be done both in the empirical world and the more abstract philosophical world all of the time. The greater evidence always trumps the lesser evidence. If Biblical Christianity is shown to be correct, then all places where the empirical data seems to be against it, regardless of how strong that data seems to be taken in itself, must be interpreted accordingly.

Paradigms in the empirical sciences are reworked, and at times are even entirely overturned, all of the time. To base one's worldview upon such probabilistic conclusions, even those that rise to the level of a very, very high degree of probability, is folly. To ask me to deny my faith based on conclusions that may not even be held by scholars 500 years from now, or possibly even 100 years from now, or in many cases as soon as 50 years from now, is not a reasonable request.

Now, I know that many will firmly object that if Biblical Christianity is true, we should expect to see a great deal of empirical data in its favor. I could not agree more. And that is precisely what we do see. See my essay on apologetics and my essay on the historicity of the Bible. Both of them can be found on my website. What we would not expect to see, is all of the empirical evidence always glaringly pointing in the direction of Biblical Christianity at every point in history. That is an outlandish expectation. The empirical evidence both in favor and against true Christianity 500 years ago, is hardly the same as it was 250 years ago. And the same is true of the evidence today in relation to the evidence 250 years ago. Empirical data is ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS(!!!) partial and ever changing.

For further resources pertaining to this section, the reader is directed towards the following sources: *Five Views on Apologetics*; *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics*; *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction*; *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*; Geisler's *Systematic Theology* Vol. 1 (unabridged); and Part 2 of my *A False Kind of Christianity*. I understand that there are other minority positions on apologetic methodology found within the church today, as well as varieties within each of the major positions, but I will be here working from the standpoint of only critiquing and interacting with the 5 major camps. Geisler has excellent summaries on most of the camps, as well as very capable overviews on the varieties found within the presuppositional world in his *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. I understand that many in the presuppositional world tend to equate the classical view with the evidentialist view, but this is incorrect.

Before diving into my position and my critiques of the opposing sides, I want to first address the issue of Scripture. I hold that the Bible commands all Christians to engage in apologetics to one degree or another. I have defended this in both my *A False Kind of Christianity* and my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*. Both of those works can be found on my website. However, I do not believe that any one particular apologetic methodology can be defended from Scripture. I believe that all attempts at this are most strained. Hence, my case for my apologetic methodology is purely philosophical and the reader should be aware of this.

As stated in my *A False Kind of Christianity*, I most fit into the basic classical mold. However, as also stated in that book, if Geisler is seen as the standard definition of that methodology, I cannot be considered a purist. As I make clear in my book, I believe that before we even get to the theistic proofs and the historical evidence (or any of the rest of the empirical evidence found in any of the empirical disciplines), we should first lay out all of the first principles as well as the logical consequences that flow from them. And as I make clear, I maintain that this also must include a statement on the self-attesting nature of Scripture. Only then, do I believe we should venture into the

theistic proofs and then the broader empirical evidence. Further, at that juncture, I believe that the theistic proofs should be seen as confirmatory and more empirical in nature themselves. I do not believe that any of the theistic proofs, other than the moral argument, admit of absolute proof from a purely rational standpoint. And I believe that the full rational moral argument should be reserved for the offensive apologetics leg of the race (the last and perhaps most important leg).

With all of that made clear, I do believe that once we get into the theistic proofs and the broader empirical data, that the logical order matters. In that sense, I am very much in line with Geisler and most classical apologists today. Geisler, throughout his illustrious career, never really fully defined his doctrine on the internal testimony. It was a major weakness in his overall theology. Sproul throughout his career maintained that in apologetics we can prove the Christian faith to the point of moral certainty, but that only the internal testimony can provide us with full certainty and assurance. This very well may be the view of the Westminster divines, but the Confession never fully spells this out. I am not convinced that Gerstner and Sproul were on the same page on this point. I believe Gerstner would have been closer to my position that I laid out in the second section of this essay. I believe Frame would agree with me there (not with my position, but in regard to where Gerstner and Sproul landed on this question).

Almost all apologists who hold to the evidentialist position or the cumulative position, along with many in the classical camp like Sproul, only advocate for a probabilistic apologetic methodology. Some, as in the case of Sproul, argue for a very, very high degree of probability. They would say that it is so high it constitutes moral certainty. Many others would argue for a much more humble (or what they see as more humble) degree of probability. Regardless of where they stand on the strength of probability question, they all agree that we cannot speak of absolute proof when it comes to apologetics. Many, like Sproul, would say that this belongs to the Spirit alone to provide. Many others say that we can never find absolute proof in this life, even from the Spirit. I reject all of this outright.

Sound apologetics supplies us with absolute proof from a rational perspective. I understand that this does not mean that we can convince most people of this. But, this is a very separate question that is far too often conflated with the question at hand. I understand that most people, even the seemingly most rational among us, hold to one or more highly irrational positions in an unbudging fashion. When that is the case, as it is in the vast majority of cases, we will never convince such a person as long as he or she remains in that unfortunate state. None of this changes the fact that from a purely rational perspective, apologetics does indeed offer absolute proof for the truth of Biblical Christianity. This is the primary reason why I reject both the evidentialist and cumulative case positions. I also reject the former for saying that we should not begin with the theistic proofs in regard to the methodological order of things between presenting the proofs and the broader empirical data. I also reject the latter for asserting that the order between the two is largely inconsequential. The logical order of starting with the theistic proofs seems rather self-evident to me. And I reject all approaches to the classical model along the lines of Sproul for that same primary reason given above in regard to my rejection of the evidentialist and cumulative case camps.

Apologetics are primarily for the child of God. Apologetics clarify, confirm, and strengthen faith. With that said, they can be used to convince the rational unbeliever. The rational unbeliever may be a rare entity, but it is incorrect to say that none exist. Further, apologetics can be used to push people in the direction of being more rational. This is especially true of offensive apologetics. Even further, apologetics can cause a person to see the futility of his or her worldview even if he or she refuses to see the cogency of the full Christian faith. Again, this is especially the case with offensive apologetics. When this happens, it is still a victory as it leaves the unbeliever in a place where he or she must begin to seek for a new worldview. We can all pray that God will use that to move him or her in a more rational direction.

I reject the Reformed epistemological method as being entirely too reductionistic. I fully agree that belief in God is properly basic. That does not, in my estimation, lead to all of the reductionistic conclusions that are extrapolated from this truth by the methodology in

question. At this point, I would like to further discuss the concepts of rationality, evidence, proof, and fact. I believe that there is a lot of confusion and bad philosophy on this front from many philosophers and apologists, both truly Christian and otherwise. I reject the common notion that proof and evidence should only be seen as being empirical in nature. Rational arguments, in my view, can be described as providing proof and evidence just as much as empirical data. They may be a different brand of proof and evidence, but I see no reason why they should not be described as such. I also reject the notion that a fact can only be seen as that which has basically been proven empirically. I define a *fact* as anything that is true. Now, I distinguish between absolute facts and functional facts, but my basic definition of *fact* remains.

I understand that we cannot prove the first principles of knowledge in any traditional sense, even as I use the term *prove* as laid out in the above paragraph. To use logic to prove logic is indeed circular. However, what we can and must do is prove that all people are always presupposing logic at all times. Yes, we are using logic to prove that fact, but that is not circular. Hence, in that qualified sense, we can “prove” the laws of logic, along with all of the first principles of knowledge.

I am also aware of the fact that my overall methodology is highly dependent upon the self-attesting nature of Scripture. Many will object that this renders my position far closer to the Reformed epistemological and presuppositional methods whether I like this fact or not. I have no problem saying that I am closer to them on this isolated point than would be the case for most classical apologists, but I still don't think that lands me in either of those camps. As I have already described in the first 3 chapters of my book response to Rauser, which I have already pointed the reader towards in this essay, my position goes far beyond the self-attesting nature of the Bible. I am not saying that the other two positions mentioned above don't, but I do believe that my method does so in a far, far more robust manner.

I reject the presuppositional method for advocating circular reasoning. I understand that many of the advocates of this position, most notably Frame, have vehemently defended

their position by saying their opponents are largely misunderstanding and misrepresenting them on this point, but I still do not believe that to be the case. In short, presuppositionalism, for the most part, is saying that we can “prove” the Christian faith somewhat along the lines of how I said we can “prove” the first principles of knowledge. The constant refrain is that everyone holds to presuppositions that cannot be proven in the traditional sense. We all have to make those decisions as to what presuppositions we are going to hold to and which ones we are going to reject. The Christian allegedly no more needs to apologize for his or her presuppositions than does anyone else. And the Christian knows that his or her presuppositions are correct through the testimony of the Spirit. Further, the unbeliever also knows deep down that the presuppositions of the Christian (or at least many of them) are correct because of the *sensus divinitatis*. The unbeliever is merely suppressing this knowledge in his or her sin.

None of this follows. The truth that the Bible is God’s special revelation cannot essentially be made into a first principle of knowledge. The truth that we know that God has provided us with His special revelation and we will know it when we see it, is indeed a first principle of knowledge. However, we cannot know that the Bible is actually this special revelation until we read it or have it read to us. This may seem like a very fine distinction, but it is extremely important. It is what removes the charge of circularity from the Christian faith.

Many presuppositionalists will retort at this point that I am not fully understanding the position and the arguments that attend it. They will say that the position is only that unless we presuppose the Christian faith, any and all worldviews will end in contradiction. Many will say that they are not saying we should presuppose the Christian faith the way we presuppose the basic reliability of our sense perceptions. They more mean it along the lines of when two rabid football fans debate over who is going to win the Super Bowl this year, as one example, they do not take the time at the outset of the conversation to rehash the rules of football. They both already know them, and thus those rules are “presupposed” in that sense.

Most presuppositionalists would agree with me that a person who has never heard of the Bible is not going to know that it is the word of God even if he or she has more than reached the age of accountability. They would also agree with me that such a person does know that the law of noncontradiction is an inviolable principle. This person may not know of the formal title of the principle, he or she may not have really ever thought through the principle very carefully, but he or she would agree that he or she already knew and understood the principle in a basic and implicit sense once it had been explained to him or her. The point, many presuppositionalists would say, is that only Christianity presents a coherent worldview.

This, unfortunately, is not actually the case. It is theoretically possible for someone to come along and to be philosophically sound across the board, and assert that this or that is special revelation. And this document and/or oral proclamation could lay out a “god” that has all of the basic attributes of the perfect being, and that also has no internal contradictions within it. From a purely philosophical standpoint, we could not prove that this worldview is inconsistent. We could only point out that it is wrong by saying that people deep down know that this document and/or oral proclamation is not God’s special revelation and that the Bible is if they will read it with an open mind. I agree that this may never have happened in the history of humankind. God may never allow it to happen. But, it is still theoretically possible. In fact, many Atheists have pointed out to me that even if Christianity, for the sake of argument, is the only rational worldview on the market today, this still would not prove it to be the one and only true worldview. And they are correct on this point as I have made clear. We should be honest about this and I don’t think the presuppositional camp is.

To be very clear, in my apologetic I make it clear that not only is Biblical Christianity the only rational and consistent worldview that I am aware of, but that also it is beyond doubt the one and only true worldview because of the self-attesting nature of the Bible. I understand that I cannot rationally prove that to people beyond telling them to read it with an open mind, but that in no way changes the truth of the matter in any way. I am all for showing the inconsistency of all of the worldviews on the planet that I am aware

of in the same basic way that the presuppositionalists do. The key difference, and I don't think it is a small one even though I know it will seem so to many, is that I believe that when we do so we should say that we are going to show people that Christianity is the only consistent worldview. I do not think it is logical to say that we are going to presuppose Christianity in order to prove Christianity.

Many presuppositionalists will object at this point that not everyone believes in the first principles of knowledge. Hence, my approach is functionally impossible. This is not true. All people who have reached the age of accountability and have normal functioning cognitive abilities, do believe in all of the first principles of knowledge, at least implicitly, deep down. Most deny one or more of them and I agree with the presuppositionalists there. I disagree with them over the idea that all unbelievers do this. Hence, I believe that at least at the outset, we should present our apologetic according to the sound first principles of knowledge that all believe in. I see no other rational option.

From there, we can deal with objections, and then we can more directly go after opposing worldviews. This does not mean that we always have to present our full apologetic in our witnessing endeavors. In the overwhelming vast majority of cases, we should not. But, apologetics and evangelism are not the same thing and I think the two are far too often conflated in the world of presuppositionalism, especially by the laity within that camp. Evangelism can and often should take from the well of apologetics as necessary. But, each encounter must be person specific. We do not need to go over the theistic proofs with the religious Jew or Muslim, as two examples. None of this changes that when we are seeking to present a fully orbbed rational apologetic, sound philosophy demands that we must do so according to the first principles of knowledge that all people know are true deep down.

When evangelizing, when people deny a certain first principle, we must simply not argue from that principle. We can go off of whatever first principles or presuppositions the person holds to and move on from there. Many presuppositionalists will say that this is all they are arguing for at the end of the day. Again though, this is to conflate

evangelism with apologetics. A full apologetic is a fully orbbed defense of the faith regardless of the worldview perspective of the reader. Evangelism must go off of where the individual lands from a worldview standpoint.

Next, let us discuss Geisler and the many classical apologists who approach things in a very similar manner to how he does. Geisler seems to agree with me throughout his works that we can provide an absolute, and not merely a highly probable, case for Biblical Christianity. Yet, I disagree with him over the notion that theistic proofs, other than the moral argument, admit of absolute philosophical proof. I do not believe that they do. I would also say that even using the moral argument in a more purely rationalistic and absolutist sense is only even needed in the first place if someone denies the basic first principle of God's existence. He did not seem to have a doctrine of the *sensus divinitatis*, and I think that is a mistake.

Further, I would disagree with him over the idea that the broader empirical data in favor of the faith can fully prove many of the aspects of the faith he seemed to think it could. I believe that this data can be used to strongly confirm the faith, but I think it is a mistake to make too much of it. And as already stated, his doctrine on the self-attesting nature of the Bible and the internal testimony of the Spirit is almost non-existent. I find this to not only be a mistake, but to be a giant black hole in the thinking of an otherwise superb theologian and apologist.

Even further, not only do I disagree with the full strength of the empirical data in question, I find it very problematic that so many theologians and apologists in the vein of Geisler fail to see the massive problems in saying that almost all doctrines can be proven via general revelation. Many of these theologians are saying that the full deity of Christ, the Trinity, the resurrection, and other core special revelation doctrines can also be proven through the means of general revelation. I find this to be wildly problematic and incorrect. Now, in fairness, they will still use the Bible in their cases. However, the Bible is only being used as a historical document, and not specifically as the word of God.

Many have responded to me by saying that they are only saying that they can prove these doctrines via general revelation in the sense of moral certainty. And that special revelation as special revelation can only bring us full certitude concerning these doctrines. That certainly was the doctrine of Sproul. And while I disagree with him regarding his overall apologetic, he was far more sound here. But, this does not seem to be the doctrine of Geisler. I never get the feeling that he is saying that the resurrection, for example, can only be proven in the sense of moral certainty.

And for many that have responded to me by saying that they only believe general revelation can prove many special revelation doctrines of the faith in a moral certainty manner, this does not help them at all because they will turn right around and say that they believe that we can only have moral certainty regarding the Christian worldview as a whole, whether we derive those doctrines from general revelation, special revelation, or both. That entirely annihilates the distinction that Sproul was making, and thus lands them in the same basic problem as Geisler. Many core special revelation doctrines are being said to be proven from general revelation every bit as much as they can be proven from special revelation.

At first blush, it may seem that I have the same basic problem and am blind to it. Have I not said on many occasions that we can prove the Christian faith in an absolute sense from apologetics? Yes, but this requires some clarification. I have said that we can show that Biblical Christianity is the only true worldview by explaining to people the self-attesting nature of Scripture, and all of the philosophical principles and conclusions that go into that assertion. This is to use general revelation to prove Biblical Christianity in an absolute sense. However, we can only fully come to all of our doctrines through a solid study of the Scriptures. General revelation can tell us that the Bible is in fact the word of God, and at that point Biblical Christianity has been proven. However, in order to fill out the content of what actually constitutes Biblical Christianity, we have to glean all of its doctrines from that very Bible. When we do this, we are no longer relying on general revelation. General revelation has already done its work.

So, with the transfiguration, for example, general revelation can provide us with a lot of empirical data to support this doctrine, and it can tell us that the Bible is in fact the word of God in a general sense, but it is only by engaging in a true study of the word of God that we can be certain of this core truth of our faith. This study does not have to be the study of a fully trained theologian. It can merely be the lay Christian genuinely reading all of the Bible carefully for himself or herself. Thus, the transfiguration must be seen as a doctrine of special revelation in the sense of us only being able to come to full certitude regarding it from special revelation alone. Other doctrines, such as the mere existence of God, come to us in a full sense from both general revelation and special revelation. Or, a better way of putting it is that this truth in itself comes to us from general revelation, but is then confirmed and filled out by special revelation. General revelation does not give us a full doctrine here. It only tells us that this perfect being exists and has a number of core attributes. But, special revelation gives to us the fullness of our knowledge concerning what all of these attributes entail.

Finally, I want to wrap up this section by saying that I believe all of the camps have their strengths. While I do believe that apologetic methodology matters very much, I do not believe that the differences are borderline earth-shattering the way many theologians practically make out. As I made clear in my *A False Kind of Christianity*, I see the differences between the camps along the lines of multiple highly talented lawyers who have been collectively hired to work as a team to defend someone and the evidence is overwhelmingly in their favor. They are each going to have their own approaches as to how to present that evidence, and these differences will matter to the final strength of their presentation. In the end though, the differences do not matter to the point of affecting their overall case very much due to both their talent and the fact that the evidence is so decidedly on their side.

Conclusion

We have covered a great deal of ground in this essay. For those interested, I will be covering even more ground in the appendices below. Nevertheless, there are still countless highly nuanced points and subpoints that could not be covered, or at the least fully dissected, in this essay. So, for any further questions, objections, or clarifications, please do not hesitate to email me.

Appendix A

In this appendix, I want to elaborate on something that I only barely touched upon earlier in this essay. And that is the fact that in my estimation, the source for general revelation, namely the natural world, is not infallible the way that special revelation is. As stated in this essay, and as I have made very clear in a number of my other works, I do not believe that God had to give His special revelation in an infallible fashion. To clarify, in one sense He did. The revelation coming directly from Him must be infallible because God is infallible. However, God could have chosen to give this infallible revelation to His prophets, and then allowed them to paraphrase it as best they could. God's special revelation would have then come to us indirectly and in a fallible manner. This would not have left us in doctrinal confusion. God could have made sure that the prophets always got the gist of things correct. If we were very careful to only go by what they said the most emphatically, clearly, and most often, we could still come to all of our doctrinal conclusions.

This is basically what we have to do today with the Scriptures. The Scriptures as we have them are not infallible. We have faulty manuscripts and imperfect translations. But, by approaching them as just outlined above, we can come to all of our doctrinal conclusions without issue. With all of this made clear and reiterated, the Scriptures are clear that this is not how God did things. He always gave His original special revelation to His people, either orally or in writing through His prophets, in an infallible manner. For more on this topic, please see my essay on the practical implications of inerrancy. It can be found on my website in the section on Tony Jones.

As I said though, I do not believe that this is how God gives to us His general revelation after the fall. The source of general revelation, the natural world, is constantly giving us incorrect information. I do think that this topic needs to be fleshed out a little more and that is what I hope to do here. At first blush, it could seem that it could be argued that even the source for general revelation could be considered infallible. One could say that when someone lies to us for example, this is not the natural realm as a whole giving to us bad information, it only constitutes one person giving to us incorrect data. We all know that we should never take the word of any fallen human being, no matter how otherwise honest and trustworthy this person has proven to be over time, as dogma. Even the very best of us lie sometimes. Therefore, it could be argued that nature as a whole is not actually telling us whatever this person is telling us. It could be argued that as long as we are very careful to interpret nature, as careful as we are with the Scriptures, we will only come to accurate conclusions and thus in that sense nature can indeed be said to be infallible.

One could also point to the fact that all orthodox theologians down through the ages have agreed that the Scriptures often infallibly record incorrect data. Right from the very beginning of Scripture we see a clear example of this. Satan lied to our first parents. He plainly tried to make it sound like God was not being good to us and that sinning against Him would be to our benefit. That was an overt lie. The Bible recording this lie was entirely accurate though. It could seem that the same basic phenomenon is playing out within the natural realm.

I am convinced that none of this follows. When someone lies to us, or the empirical data available to us at any given point in history seems to strongly point in the wrong direction, I do not see how this constitutes nature simply infallibly recording for us the inaccurate information from another source. We as humans are part of nature. The empirical data is part of the natural realm. This seems to me to be a fundamental difference from what is going on with special revelation. When the Scriptures record for us the incorrect statements from others, they are recording for us something that came from another source. When Moses infallibly recorded the lies of the serpent, the serpent

is by definition other than Moses. We are not other than nature. We are part of nature. It seems to me that what is going on with nature is far more akin to what we have in our current translations of the Bible. Those translations (and I am only talking about the true translations of the Bible) often include passages that may not have been in the original. Sometimes these translations have mistranslated passages. When this occurs, errors are found in the translations. Those errors are part of the translation. They are not separate from it and are merely being recorded by the translation.

Even here though, I think we have to be careful. Nature is shot through with errors, mostly coming from us as humans being dishonest or careless with our words. And I don't think God would ever give to us His special revelation in that manner. I believe that even if God had decided to give to us His special revelation in the fallible manner I described earlier, He would have kept the errors of His prophets to a minimum the way that He does with the manuscripts and good translations of the Scriptures. Technically speaking, we could have still come to our doctrinal conclusions even if God had allowed His prophets to speak errors on a regular basis. For example, if a prophet was a blabbermouth that even when paraphrasing often gave too many extraneous details, this prophet's telling of God's revelation could be filled to the brim with minor errors. However, we could still use the same methods used earlier to come to our doctrinal conclusions. We would merely need to get in the habit of ignoring a lot of the extraneous tangential of this prophet and again stick to the core teachings that this prophet did emphasize repeatedly and clearly. Again though, I don't think God would have ever done it this way.

But, I do think that this is the reality for us with general revelation. I do believe that we can come to absolute truths, basic ones, from general revelation. Yet, I also believe that general revelation is fraught with perils and must be approached with the greatest of care. This does not mean that the Scriptures can be approached casually. Far from it. However, I do believe that almost all heresies come from adding to the word of God or taking away from it. I believe that most secondary errors within the church come from bad hermeneutics. I am not making light of this problem. But, as serious as these errors

are, they are still not heresies at the end of the day. If the Scriptures are read with an open mind, fully and repeatedly, all people will come to the essential doctrines that it teaches. They may not articulate all of them in the technical manner that the church has done, but they will see the basic doctrine in question. For example, people on their own would not use the language of *Trinity*, but all would see that there is only one God; that the Father is God; the Son is God; the Spirit is God; and that in some mysterious manner the Father is not the Son and vice versa; the Father is not the Spirit and vice versa; and the Son is not the Spirit and vice versa.

I understand that Geisler and other theologians have argued that the perils that can come from approaching either general revelation or special revelation too casually are about equal, but I do not at all think that is the case. And I think that the vast majority of theologians, both today and throughout church history, would agree with me. Thus, I stand by what I said in the body of my essay earlier. And that is that I think one key difference between general revelation and special revelation after the fall is that the source for general revelation is very fallible, whereas the source for special revelation was originally not.

Appendix B

In this appendix, I wish to discuss a common retort I get from many online, especially very cocky Atheists. And it is basically this: "Who do you think you are?" Because I am often very firm with those who seek to attack God's truth, many ask this question. Because I am not a very well-known scholar or apologist, the sentiment is how can I possibly dare to be so firm in my responses. These ignorant Atheists, and others, don't realize that this is nothing more than the logical fallacy known as *the appeal to authority*. It does not matter who I am, people need to make substantive counterarguments to my arguments.

For all they know, I am a highly well read lay person. If the argument is strong and sound, they need to answer it. End of story. If I display ignorance on any subject, they

can point that out as I often do with them. Very often, these Fundamentalist Atheists merely quote and parrot their favorite scholars as if that ends all discussion. Usually, I don't even disagree with the scholars they are quoting. Usually, I agree that the evidence in one particular area is indeed not favorable to Christianity. Most Conservative Evangelical scholars would agree with me. But, these internet figures are usually so ignorant of the broader issues in philosophy and apologetics that they have convinced themselves that merely proving that the evidence in one area of academic inquiry is not favorable to Biblical Christianity as a whole somehow means that Biblical Christianity has been definitively disproved. What is so ironic is that even the very scholars they quote would not say that. These scholars understand that this evidence alone is not enough to fully disprove the faith from a philosophical perspective.

And it is not like I have no credentials whatsoever. Such is absolutely false. You can read more about those in my "About Me" essay. It can be found on my website. I also discuss my credentials even further in my book response to Randal Rauser. That work can be found on my website in the section on Progressive Christianity. And that section can be found within the section on the religions of the world. I highly recommend reading the first five chapters of that book to get a solid feel for my capabilities in the areas of theology, church history, and apologetics. With all that said, even when I have to bring all this up with folks online when pressed, they still usually say something along the lines of, "How can you possibly go against all these scholars. You're not a scholar. Where are your scholarly publications?" Again this is nothing more than the appeal to authority. It is also a form of the logical fallacy known as *the appeal to majority*. Even further, as stated above, I usually don't even disagree with these scholars they are quoting in the main!

Most of these folks don't really understand how a PhD works. A PhD only makes you a complete expert in a very narrow subject. You have to already be an expert or master in the broader subjects behind the narrow subject that will be the focus of the study in the PhD program in order to even be accepted into the PhD program in the first place. For instance, I was accepted into the PhD program at the University of Aberdeen. The topic

that was accepted from me was Warfield's doctrine of Scripture. That is a very, very narrow field of study. In order to get into the program in the first place I had to first show that I was already an expert in the broader field of systematic theology. And I did so through my two Master's in theology, the second specifically being in systematic theology.

And it is not like if I was a *bona fide* scholar, with a highly respected professor position at one of the most prestigious and secular universities, with countless scholarly publications to my name, this would make any difference to them. They would say that while I may have a lot of knowledge that must be respected, at the end of the day, my conclusions are bogus because they are all clouded by my believing biases. This is precisely what they do when I quote or refer them to more conservative scholars. They again don't realize that they are engaging in another logical fallacy (noticing a pattern here much?). It is the logical fallacy known as *comparative circumstantial ad hominem*.

The fact of the matter is that I was well on my way to becoming a scholar. But, issues with my ex-wife prevented that from taking place. I am only 44 years old and I have basically been a single parent for ten years now. And I have truly been one for seven and a half years. This has hardly been conducive to me being able to write and publish scholarly works. With that made clear, I have continued to read and study on my own every bit as much as if I was a fully credentialed scholar. Anyone can challenge me on this assertion in a formal moderated debate. Finally, as said in the chapters in my response to Rauser referred to above, I am currently working on a scholarly work and I have no doubt that it will be traditionally published if nothing prevents me from finishing it. Hence, my detractors need to answer my arguments in a substantive manner, or challenge me to a formal moderated debate, or seek to set up such a debate with someone appropriate if they do not feel qualified themselves. Anything less than this is nothing more than excuse making. Period.

One final item needs to be addressed in this appendix. And that is the fact that some have criticized me for not putting more footnotes into my works. One can read my

Calvin's Controversial Vivifying Flesh Doctrine (it can be found on my website) to see that I am perfectly capable of writing in the more traditional scholarly manner. With that said, most of my other works are meant for the earliest of beginners, or those who struggle with intellectual matters, or those who have very little time for in-depth theology, or those who are just getting started in their endeavors to take their faith more seriously. I very intentionally avoid footnotes in those works because too many footnotes can be intimidating. With that said, I always, always, always point my readers to where they can find the necessary resources to check my assertions and to dig deeper if they so desire.

And I admit that sometimes I point them to things broadly so as to encourage them to read many sources or read an entire source. My desire is to always both avoid intimidation, but also gently and subtly encourage deeper study as people feel ready for that. Further, I always provide contact information for myself by which people can ask me further questions or request that I very specifically point them to where they can find more information that will more directly substantiate a particular point. Many have taken me up on this offer and I am always happy to accommodate people on this score. Finally, whenever something absolutely must be cited, like a direct quote, I am always very careful to provide a citation in such instances.

As far as my works that are not for beginners, these often do have more citations. With that made clear, these works (other than the book I am working on referenced above) are not meant for scholarly publication. Hence, I feel no need to follow every tedious rule. It allows me to write a lot more and a lot faster this way. But, I again always give to the reader ample source material by which he or she can check my works or dig deeper as desired. And many times I will use a traditional footnote (I generally use Chicago style), but other times I might simply give a link, or say where in one of my other works one can find something, or where in another work one can find something. As long as I am being very careful to never plagiarize and to point people to how they can easily find something, I feel no need to always use formal citations in works for my website that are not going to be published in the traditional scholarly fashion. So, for example, if I say that someone can find something from a simple Google search, I see no reason why

that should not suffice. And as with my works that are on the easier side, I also always provide my contact info with my more difficult works (none are that difficult and I try very hard to never write in a more difficult or technical manner than is absolutely necessary) so that people can ask me for more specifics as needed.

People need to realize that a work having a ton of footnotes is no guarantee of accuracy or good scholarship. Sometimes it is a strong indication that the author is trying too hard and it is a smokescreen to cover for how little he or she has really put in the time to fully enmesh himself or herself in a given topic. What people need to understand is that rarely do the arguments come down solely to the data. Most scholars are in basic agreement about the data. The data is the data. The arguments, generally speaking, come down to the interpretations of the data. Some of the most learned people are also some of the most illogical.

Therefore, I generally try to give people ample resources in a general sense so that they can enmesh themselves in the subject if they have the time and will to do so. And then I largely try to interpret the data as best I can and those who have put in the hard work can then decide for themselves. Unfortunately, if we are being real, most people only read from those who are going to tell them what they want to hear. This allows the author to make stretched interpretations while providing countless footnotes that will never be read or checked by the reader, but that allow the reader to feel good about himself or herself because *clearly* the author knows what he or she is talking about because of all those footnotes! I am not going to play this game. I genuinely challenge the reader to show where I make any basic errors of fact or reflect ignorance over any subject that I address in any of my works.

Many may say, "Ok fine, all of that makes basic sense. But, often you don't even give publication information for many books you reference or recommend. Shouldn't you at least do that?" If I cite something very specific, like a direct quote, I will always provide some publication info. However, if I am just recommending a whole book, I see no reason why this is necessary. Most books can now be easily found over at Amazon or

through an easy Google search, even the oldest and/or most obscure ones. And it should be implied that I am recommending the most recent version or edition of the book in question. People need to realize that times have changed and that most younger people (one of my primary target audiences) prefer to read a more freelance style when reading material online. I have intentionally geared my writings for my website accordingly.

Finally, I have more to say about my overall writing style and my approach to my works in general, especially those put out on my website, in the first chapter of my response to Rauser that I have referenced many times in this essay, for those interested.

Appendix C

In this appendix I want to discuss my reasoning for sometimes being pretty stern in my responses to the most tenacious enemies of the faith. Many true Christians and many more unbelievers have accused me of being hypocritical on this front as an orthodox Christian. Am I not supposed to love my enemies? Yes, I absolutely am and I seek to do so as often as I can with the help of the Holy Spirit. I want to be clear that even as an ardent Calvinist, I believe that the overwhelming vast majority of people are exceedingly good and hard working people from a civil perspective.

My belief in total depravity only means that I do not believe that anyone can do anything that is truly and fully good in the eyes of God unless it is done solely and completely for the glory of God. I do not believe that believers are even capable of this type of good. However, I do believe that we can speak of “good” in lesser senses and that this is both philosophically and biblically sound. Believers can do works that are “good” in the sight of God in that they are pleasing to God as our Father. He would never ever accept such imperfect works as our judge, but He does graciously accept them and reward them (both in this life and the next) as our Father. I believe that we can also speak of “good” deeds from a civil perspective. God does not accept these works either as judge or Father (obviously because He is not the Heavenly Father of unbelievers). But, He does

“accept” them in the sense that they will be judged far, far less harshly than overtly evil acts. These good deeds can be called civic good. Finally and most importantly, in regard to the doctrine of total depravity, I believe that no one will ever come to God on his or her own in an unregenerate state.

With all that firmly in place, I believe that around 95-98% of the world, both today and throughout history, are good and decent people from a civic good standpoint. I am always over the top nice with such people whether anyone desires to believe that or not. Many, many people could testify to this. And I believe that almost all of the commands about how we are to treat people as Christians apply to how we are to treat people who fall into this category. Such people are still our enemies as Christians in a manner of speaking. They are enemies of God and thus are by definition our enemies in a certain very important respect. But, and this is so crucial, that remaining 2-5% of the population causes enormous amounts of problems for humanity. And I believe that both the church and broader society must be very strong and swift in dealing with such people.

This in no way means that we cannot love such people in countless ways. We absolutely can. We can avoid being cruel to them. We can show mercy to them within reason. We can seek to counsel and help those who are willing to be helped. As Christians, we can and must preach the gospel to them. Most importantly, as Christians, we can fervently pray for such people, especially for their salvation. However, in many respects, such people do have to be approached differently than we approach your average human being. It is naive or disingenuous to act like anything else is in fact the case. And I have repeatedly found that most Christians who may seek to criticize myself and others for showing tough love to this demographic, largely ignore this segment of the population. This allows them to avoid the inevitable cognitive dissonance that would result from actually trying to minister and address these folks. I find that very hypocritical and frustrating. Many Christians try to witness to the folks I labor with online and usually give up because they flounder. I don't find this helpful or biblical.

Further, when I refer to that 2-5%, I am not just referring to the murderers and the rapists, although they are certainly included. I am also referring to those whose ideology and zeal cause severe problems for the church and/or the broader culture. Many conservatives in our country often act like half of America is filled with a bunch of raging liberals. This is not the case. This reflects a staggering level of ignorance. First of all, only about 60% of the population votes. And even about 10-20% of that percentage don't vote very consistently. Only about 45-50% of the population votes regularly; perhaps even less than that. And of that 45-50%, a large number are Independents. That 45-50% is not evenly split down the middle between Democrats and Republicans. Only about 25% of the American population can be considered truly Democrat and only about 20-25% of the population can be considered truly Republican.

And what many people fail to realize is that many Democrats are very conservative on a lot of issues. This is especially true of many minority Democrat voters. Those that make up the truly dangerous hard Left only make up about 10% of our country. About half of those are young people who are easily swayed by professors and others. They have not truly made up their mind about things and such young people almost always end up becoming more conservative with age. The genuinely hardened Left only makes up about 5% of the American population. But, this group is unimaginably dangerous. Their views are subversive to our society and they hold tremendous amounts of power in our country. They largely control the education, media, entertainment, and athletic spheres of our society. It is a miracle that they don't do more damage more quickly. Such people are not to be treated with kid gloves from a rhetorical perspective. We are to bluntly confront them in the sphere of dialogue and point out the vacuous nature of their arguments. We are also to be very transparent concerning the evil of their tactics.

The same is also true in the realm of theology and apologetics. Most people in other religions are good and decent people. They have simply been terribly misled. We are to be as kind and gentle with such people as humanly possible. Even many of the leaders in these groups are very polite and congenial. While we need to be more firm with them, we also need to approach them with some degree of caution because such people are

trying so hard to be decent with us on some level. But, the nasty leaders of these groups and their many disciples online have to be approached with tough love. When we don't do this, they merely mock us and dismiss us. And only pointing out to them that this is what they are doing does nothing to dissuade them. At times, we must be very, very firm in order to get their attention. On rare occasions we can and should mildly mock some of their conclusions to again get their attention. I understand that not all Christians are cut out for this type of ministry and that is fine. I am not asking most Christians to join me in this dark world. All I am asking is for some more understanding and less criticism. You often have no idea what you are talking about, and I mean that with the utmost respect.

Many Christians will respond by pointing to Jesus' words in Matthew 7:6. Are we not supposed to cease from arguing with the most nasty unbelievers based on Jesus' words here? Yes, we are. But, that does not mean that we are supposed to not even try from the outset. The entire NT would be against such an approach. Such people need the gospel every bit as much as the rest of us, obviously. I agree that if we are getting nowhere with such people, we are to move on and I almost always do, unless I really feel led to keep trying with someone. With that made clear, I do not believe that Jesus' words apply to the nasty leaders. We are not to allow them to disparage our Lord and mislead people in large numbers unabated. We are to confront them as Jesus, the prophets, the apostles, and Apollos did. They are our example and we are not to pretend like we know better than them, or worse, that we are holier than them.

As far as defending this approach from the Scriptures, I have already done so thoroughly in the first chapter to my book response to Randal Rauser that I referenced earlier in this essay. Please read that for more clarification.