

In Defense of James White

By Dan Jensen (2024)

(In order to fully benefit from this essay, I recommend reading through my “works for beginners” first. They can be found on my website.)

Dr. James White is one of the greatest theologians and apologists of the past 100 years, and one could honestly make the case for calling him one of the best of all time. The fact that the man has done so many debates against some of the toughest enemies of the faith, and has done so in such a capable fashion, alone testifies to what I said in my opening sentence. Debates are far, far harder than the average Christian realizes. I learned firsthand how much background goes into a debate that can deeply affect the debate in ways that the believer often has no control over. I also learned just how dishonest and underhanded the enemies of the faith can be. I have written about all of this in the section on Tony Jones on my website. And there are even some things I have not included as I want to be careful not to get into any legal battles with Tony. I am sure Dr. White has had to deal with much worse than I did and yet he has won decisively almost every debate he has ever participated in. And of those very, very few where his victory was somewhat debatable (no pun intended), he still always got in a number of jabs and again, there were almost always factors going on behind the scenes that did not allow him to do as well as he normally would. That is only his debates; his books, his teachings, and his speaking engagements have all been invaluable to me and to so many others in the church as well.

Dr. White is also a very kind Christian man. I understand that he can come off as gruff to some, but I had the privilege of going to lunch with him one time, and behind the tough exterior is a man that cares profoundly for the body of Christ. I had the wonderful honor of introducing him at an event that my church hosted where he was the speaker. This was in Cedar City, UT. Because of this, my pastor gave me his phone number so that I

could contact him if anything went wrong in the lead up to the event. After the event, I sent him a thank you text not expecting any response. Not because of anything about Dr. White that I had ever seen before, but I just know how unbelievably busy he is. And he not only shot me back an extremely nice text, he invited me to go to lunch with him the next time he was passing through Cedar! I was overjoyed and I will never forget that experience. We went to TacoTime, which was way more up my alley than some fancy restaurant. It was befitting of the humility of Dr. White.

Thus, I have been rather disgusted by the way he has been treated by many in the Reformed world over recent years. I have my strong disagreements with Dr. White. I am a Confessional Presbyterian. I am a huge fan of Aquinas. I am in many respects a disciple of Gerstner and Sproul. And I do disagree with Dr. White on certain elements of Trinitarian doctrine. But, the idea that just because he is so passionately opposed to Aquinas and takes some views on the Trinity that are different than my own, hardly means that he is heretical or even dangerous. My goodness; these are highly abstract and deeply secondary points of theology. I am not saying that they are altogether unimportant. Dr. White would agree with me that they are very important. But, let's not exaggerate their importance either. To do so is just plain wrong and is woefully divisive. This type of attitude is precisely why the Reformed world often does not see the growth that we should. I rejoice that because of Sproul, Dr. White, and so many other bright lights, we have seen a massive resurgence of Reformed theology around the world. With that said, there is no question in my mind that the arrogance, nitpicking, and divisiveness that so often marks our camp repels far too many that would otherwise be very open to the doctrines of grace.

Dr. White has been like a father in Christ to me. I had to keep myself from utterly gushing with him when we went to lunch. I hope that I did an ok job on that front! So embarrassing if I did not.... But, when I was first saved I craved sound biblical teaching. And Dr. White was one of the first people God led me towards. He and Sproul were absolutely instrumental in causing me to embrace Reformed doctrine. His many debates, especially his debates against countless Catholic apologists, were also beyond

helpful to me as I really struggled with whether or not I should become a Catholic in the early days of my Christian journey. I know that many, many others can give similar testimonies. There is nothing wrong with disagreeing with Dr. White. Let us not get carried away though. Dr. White is a hero of the faith and he should be recognized as such.