

*The Faithful Apologist* comes from the biblically infused thought and heart of the careful Reformed theologian Scott Oliphint, and as such it provides meticulous theological reflection on how persuasion takes place by and through God's word and the measured use of classical rhetorical realities. The result is a theologian's compelling *cri de coeur* to follow the graced scriptural path to gospel persuasion—as commended by St. Paul—"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Col 4:5–6). This is a foundational book, an indispensable prolegomenon to persuasion, and will serve the church well, not only in personal evangelism but in the preaching of the gospel to a lost world.

R. KENT HUGHES, senior pastor emeritus,  
College Church, Wheaton, Illinois

Dr. Scott Oliphint is well-known as an academic theologian and apologist who has devoted himself to matters of the intellect, but he has also been a pastor who has devoted himself to people. In *The Faithful Apologist* he helps us understand the importance of both devotions—not only in terms of the way we think, or even the people we address, but in terms of who we—the apologists—are. Some readers will be intrigued or even surprised at first sight by his skilful (but very welcome!) borrowing from Aristotle's insistence on the triad of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* in all good communication. But in doing so, Oliphint touches on principles embedded in the biblical doctrine of the image of God and that are constantly exhibited and illustrated in Scripture but often overlooked by Christians.

*The Faithful Apologist* carries an important message for us all, reminiscent of the opening words of E. M. Bounds's famous book on prayer ("The church is looking for better methods, God is looking for better men"). Scott Oliphint reminds us that while the church is looking for *better apologetics*, God himself is looking for *better apologists*.

DR. SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON, Ligonier teaching  
fellow and Chancellor's Professor of Systematic  
Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary

Christian apologetics has come a long way since being gagged by the “crisis theology” of Karl Barth. The defense of the faith is once more a legitimate endeavor. Yet there is a view abroad that all we need to do is amass evidence until rational people yield and admit the Christian faith is true. Unfortunately, reasonable people are becoming rare. Now is the time for persuasion. Very little work has been done on the biblical basis for persuasion. Dr. Oliphint’s contribution is invaluable. His working definition is “the discerning and initiating of a *connection* between two or more persons.” If that sounds abstract, Oliphint points us to the entire Bible, and especially to Jesus Christ, whose mission was “a design of divine persuasion.” The reason? God’s great love, which issues in his “condescension.” In keeping with that, Oliphint has remarkable pages on certain passages, such as Romans 1, Acts 17, and 1 Peter 3, worth the price of the book. This book should be read and enjoyed by all Christians wanting to recover the art of persuasion.

WILLIAM EDGAR, professor of apologetics, Westminster  
Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

*The*  
FAITHFUL  
*Apologist*



*The*  
FAITHFUL  
*Apologist*

---

RETHINKING *THE*  
ROLE OF PERSUASION  
*IN* APOLOGETICS

---

K. SCOTT OLIPHINT

 ZONDERVAN  
ACADEMIC

ZONDERVAN ACADEMIC

*The Faithful Apologist*

Copyright © 2022 by K. Scott Oliphint

Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

Zondervan titles may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fundraising, or sales promotional use. For information, please email [SpecialMarkets@Zondervan.com](mailto:SpecialMarkets@Zondervan.com).

978-0-310-14025-2 (audio)

---

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Oliphint, K. Scott, 1955- author.

Title: *The faithful apologist : rethinking the role of persuasion in apologetics* / K. Scott Oliphint.

Description: Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 2022.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021035007 (print) | LCCN 2021035008 (ebook) | ISBN 9780310590101 (paperback) | ISBN 9780310590125 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Apologetics. | Influence (Psychology)--Religious aspects--Christianity. | Bible--Evidences, authority, etc.

Classification: LCC BT1103 .O454 2022 (print) | LCC BT1103 (ebook) | DDC 239--dc23/eng/20211021

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021035007>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021035008>

---

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version<sup>®</sup>, NIV<sup>®</sup>. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.<sup>®</sup> Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.Zondervan.com](http://www.Zondervan.com). The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.<sup>®</sup>

Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from the ESV<sup>®</sup> Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version<sup>®</sup>). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible<sup>®</sup>. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org)).

Scripture quotations marked TNIV are taken from the Holy Bible, Today's New International Version TNIV<sup>®</sup>. Copyright © 2001, 2005 by International Bible Society.<sup>®</sup> Used by permission of International Bible Society<sup>®</sup>. All rights reserved worldwide. “TNIV” and “Today's New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society<sup>®</sup>.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Cover design: LUCAS Art & Design

Cover photo: © inbj / Masterfile

Interior design: Kait Lamphere

Printed in the United States of America

---

22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 /TRM/ 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

---

# CONTENTS

---

*Introduction* ..... ix

## **PART 1:**

### **Biblical Foundations of Apologetics and Persuasion**

- 1. The Divine Persuader ..... 3
- 2. The Divine Defender ..... 31
- 3. The Divine Sword ..... 61

## **PART 2:**

### **Parts and Principles of Apologetics and Persuasion**

- 4. Ethos ..... 97
- 5. Pathos ..... 133
- 6. Logos ..... 167

*Conclusion* ..... 197





---

# INTRODUCTION

---

Almost immediately after my conversion to Christ, I was eager to tell people what had happened to me so they might have the same experience. I became a volunteer leader in an evangelistic ministry, and it was not long before I had the opportunity to communicate to others the joy and reality of my own conversion. I wanted both to commend and to defend the Christian faith. One occasion from those early days sticks out in my memory—a conversation with a man who had become a good friend.

I remember my almost desperate desire that this man be converted. I wanted to tell him all I had learned and to defend its truth if needed. I sat down with him one day and began to explain the gospel to him. I talked about God as our Creator. I explained how sin had entered our world through Adam. I gave him examples of sin's effects in almost every aspect of the world today.

Then I recounted to him the story of Christmas and told him the good news of the cross of Christ, his resurrection, and ascension. I then told him that, like the Philippian jailer, all that was required on our part was to believe in Christ and we would be saved. I flooded him with as much information as I could muster.

As a young and inexperienced Christian, I was greatly encouraged that throughout the discussion, he was nodding in agreement with

## The Faithful Apologist

everything I said. I was ready to defend it all, but he had no real objections. It all seemed to be so seamless and easy. I don't recall that he had even a single question for me.

When I had said everything I knew to say, I asked him if he was ready to make a commitment and to believe in Christ. He answered with a single word: "No."

I was stunned. I asked him, given what I had said, why he wasn't ready to make a commitment. His response still rings in my ears: "Nothing you have said indicates that I *need* this. I can't see the need for a commitment." His response devastated me, though I tried not to show it.

This encounter has been embedded in my memory for a few decades now. One reason for that, surely, is that it was one of my first experiences attempting to convince someone of something I was so passionately committed to. I saw myself in those nascent days as a true apologist for Christianity.

Another reason it has stuck with me is that, upon later reflection, it became clear to me that my only goal in that conversation was to impart as much information as I could. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with telling people the truth of the gospel, but through that entire conversation, I failed to connect what I was telling him to his own life, his own beliefs, his own needs, his own experiences. As a matter of fact, I don't think I was concerned about those aspects of his life at all. I don't remember asking him any questions about his own life.

My only concern was to tell the truth, and I assumed that was all I needed to bring him to a commitment. But I was wrong. In my conversation with him about the gospel, I should have focused not only on the truth of the message I wanted to defend, as glorious as that truth is, but also on how I might connect that glorious message with his experiences, bridging the gap between his own life and his need for the gospel. I should have focused on commending those gospel truths to him *persuasively*.

As we think together in the coming pages about apologetics and persuasion, we can define persuasion simply as our attempts to discern and

## Introduction

initiate a connection between two or more people in order to defend and commend the gospel to them. Apologetics is concerned with defending the faith once and for all given to the saints (Jude 3). Persuasion is, at root, concerned with connecting that defense to those who might otherwise oppose it. By attempting to connect with them, a bridge is built between us and them so that our defense of the gospel and its truth can cross over from us to them.

Our subject in the coming pages is as exciting as it is elusive. It comes to us under two primary topics: apologetics and persuasion. With both of these, we will focus on the relationship of Christianity to its opponents and detractors. As we consider these two topics, we want to think about how the Word of God can be communicated by us in order to defend the Christian faith in a persuasive manner.

It might be that many will think of these two as opposites. Persuasion seeks and finds *connections* between two or more disparate viewpoints. Apologetics, on the other hand, tends to focus on *confrontation* as it seeks to meet objections against Christianity. We hope to make the case that these two are at their biblical and theological best when they merge together. We will also see that even as Christian apologetics seeks for *connections* between Christianity and those who would oppose it, so also can persuasion engage in *confrontation* between opposing views. The two topics, then, far from being mutually exclusive, sharpen each other as iron sharpens iron.

As a matter of fact, as we will see, these two topics substantially and significantly overlap, or at least they should. As we consider some of the primary aspects of them both, we will be focused on and interested in their *biblical and theological context*. That context needs to be set firmly in place in our minds and hearts, since it is foundational in order for apologetics and persuasion to successfully engage any other context—cultural or otherwise.

The proper context for persuasion and for apologetics is, in the first place, *Scripture*. Perhaps this sounds obvious; if so, very good. Too often, however, both topics can give the impression that they are each simply a

## The Faithful Apologist

matter of a proper *method* or *technique*.<sup>1</sup> If we can master a set of “theistic proofs,” we might think, then our task in apologetics is mostly done. All that we need to do, no matter the situation, is to highlight the need for a “First Cause,” or the rationality of a “Necessary Existence,” and we have done our best and accomplished our goal to defend the faith.

Or perhaps we think that persuasion is nothing more than a sophisticated advertising campaign. We use a certain technique to create a need, and then “sell” our remedy to the need we have created. In other words, we create the need, then meet the need with our “product.” Persuasion accomplished.

This kind of thinking about apologetics and persuasion is both subtle and dangerous. It is subtle for at least two reasons: First, there is an element of truth in the examples given above that can, when *properly* understood, provide help for us in our attempts to persuade people of the truth of the Christian faith and to defend that faith against objections and attacks. It certainly is the case that God is the first cause of all that exists (except Himself) and that He necessarily exists. But to think that is the central focus of Christian apologetics is to unduly short-circuit its richness and depth. We’ll discuss this more later on.

Second, one of the primary allures of technique, which pervades our culture and society, is that, once learned, persuasion is easily accomplished. So, instead of diving below the superficial, we can begin to think that we can “bottle” a certain method of persuasion and then “pour it out” on anyone and everyone in exactly the same way. We are tempted to want a quick and easy fix for any and all objections that might come our way. We might resist complexity and patience, wanting instead a kind of “four spiritual laws” of persuasion or a “twelve-step program” of apologetics.

But apologetics and persuasion cannot be reduced to simple formulas or methods or techniques. Because both of them have to do, in the first place, with the Christian faith and its application to *people*, they are both

---

1. For one of the best and most accessible assessments of Christian persuasion and the problem of *technique*, see Os Guinness, *Fool’s Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

## Introduction

deeply and magnificently rooted in the truth of God and His revelation. That is to say, both apologetics and persuasion are, from top to bottom, *biblical and theological*. They have their initial *animus*, their *raison d'être*, their proper focus, in the rich and vibrant soil of God's Word.

Because of the central and crucial importance of Scripture in our apologetics and in persuasion, this book will provide some of the crucial biblical and theological truths that should inform our persuasive defense of Christianity. In that way, this book should be seen as a Bible study on persuasive apologetics. It is a biblical and theological introduction to a persuasive apologetic.

With that in view, the first three chapters will set out the biblical and theological foundations of our topic. In the second section, chapters 4 through 6, we will consider the art of persuasion as it is given and demonstrated to us in Holy Scripture. Because of our focus, it would be useful for you to have a Bible nearby throughout our discussion. I hope to explain some of the main contours of persuasion and apologetics as they relate to key aspects of biblical truth.

In the pages to come, you'll see there is a natural and automatic connection (biblically speaking) between the discipline of apologetics and the art of persuasion. This connection has not been prominent in much of the literature on apologetics. Typically, apologetics has been linked to the sometimes difficult and abstract thinking of philosophy, like two sides of a coin. Because of this, the goal that apologetics has often set for itself has been centered around the notion of demonstrative, philosophical "proofs."

Of course, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with a Christian interaction with, and even co-opting of, philosophical ideas and concepts. The history of theology is evidence of a faithful use of philosophy. And oftentimes, perhaps most times, the challenge that has been lodged against Christianity includes the demand to "prove" that God exists. That challenge, too, needs a response.

But apologetics is not, in the first place, a philosophical discipline. It was never meant to be reserved solely for academics and intellectuals

## The Faithful Apologist

who enjoy the thrill of debate. Apologetics is meant for the people of God (see 1 Pet 3:15). It is meant to express hope amid a hopeless and suffering world. If philosophical objections come against Christianity, as they often have, then it might be useful to try to answer them according to similar philosophical vocabulary. But that is just one aspect of the discipline of apologetics, not its core. Its core consists of biblical reasons for the hope that is ours in Christ.

We should not think, however, that apologetics has nothing to do with method or with philosophical ideas. Neither should we think that the demand for “proofs” rules out the possibility of persuasion. Instead, we should see all of these various notions—apologetics, proofs, philosophy, persuasion, and more besides—as in need (as is everything) of substantial and foundational biblical and theological roots.

With those roots firmly established, each notion, and all of them together, can grow in the proper soil and produce much fruit along the way. Without those rich roots, apologetics, proofs, philosophical ideas, and persuasion are sure to wither and die; they will be nothing more than lifeless weeds on a dry and parched ground.

Though our particular focus in this book will be a biblical study of the central aspects of apologetics and persuasion, we will need to broach the subject of philosophical proofs as well. Even as we do, the ultimate goal throughout our study will be that God would be honored and glorified in our thinking about these things, and in their doing. If that goal is accomplished in these pages, and in our lives, then, from the perspective of Scripture, we will have succeeded.

As we will see, “success” in apologetics and in persuasion, so far as it depends on us, can only be measured by our faithful thinking and living. It cannot, and must not, be measured by responses that we might receive as we attempt to defend and persuade people concerning the Christian faith.

In our defense, and in our persuasion, we must recognize that the triune *God*, and He alone, is the only one able to draw people to Himself. Our defense and our persuasion are done as means to His sovereign ends.

## Introduction

But it is He, and He alone, who ultimately defends His glory, and who *actually* has the power to defend and to persuade. As we think biblically and theologically about apologetics and persuasion, these must be our starting points: God is the Divine Persuader, and God is the Divine Apologist.

In part 1, our study of Scripture will highlight those two crucial truths. We will then need to set firmly in place the foundation of the Word of God as our “weapon” in the battle with unbelief. Scripture reminds us that God’s Word is like a sword, not only piercing our own hearts, but piercing through hard, unbelieving hearts in our spiritual battle (Heb 4:12; cf. Eph 6:17).

In part 2, we will look at Scripture from the perspective of three specific aspects of persuasion. Those three aspects focus on the *person* who is attempting to persuade, the *persons* to whom we speak, and the *message* we are attempting to convey. We will see how those aspects easily merge with our defense of Christianity. In those discussions, we will see how we can be properly commissioned into His service, as we seek to be, under Him, defenders of and persuaders toward the majestic truth of that great good news of the gospel, without which no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14).

As we work through Scripture in order to highlight the relationship of apologetics and persuasion, each and every point made must be shrouded in and filtered by the central truth that God Himself is the Faithful Apologist and Persuader. That truth is both liberating and motivating. It is liberating because it reminds us that the actual work of changing human hearts belongs to Him alone. No amount of human ingenuity or attractive presentations will change a heart of stone to a heart of flesh. Our burden is not to try to “sell” the gospel to someone. Instead, our concern is to commend His truth in a wise way, a way that would connect that truth to our audience.

That God is our Faithful Apologist is motivating because the Lord, who alone is able to draw us to Himself (John 6:44), has given to us the means He uses to persuade others. It is our communication of His truth

## The Faithful Apologist

that He employs as the key to unlock hard hearts so they open up to the gospel. He has given us that key, and He enjoins us to use it with wisdom (Col 4:5). As we do, our Faithful Apologist, according to His own infinite wisdom, promises to draw people to Himself by persuading them of His glorious good news.





PART 1

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS  
*of Apologetics and  
Persuasion*





## ONE

---

# *The* DIVINE *Persuader*

---

Christianity is, and has always been, a religion of *persuasion*. If the core of persuasion is a *connection* between two (or more) different parties, then nowhere is this demonstrated more clearly than in God's activity as the Divine Persuader. We delight in the fact that, in history, the Lord God comes down and *speaks* directly to people. His words are given to His people because *He* stoops down to speak.

This may be so commonplace to us that we miss its majesty. It is, however, a glorious truth that the One who is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, who Himself dwells in unapproachable light, nevertheless clothes Himself in such a way that we can see and know Him. It is the most remarkable truth of our Christian religion: The triune God, whom we otherwise could not approach, *approaches us* in order that we might come to Him and live with Him for eternity.

In Islam, to use just one example, words and commands were supposedly given by Allah to Muhammad, over a period of twenty-three (or so) years. They were then given from Muhammad to the followers of Islam. Debate still rages in Islam over whether the eternal Allah could even touch the temporal world to transmit the words of the Koran.<sup>1</sup> It is “below” Allah to be in touch with time. The Koran simply reveals Allah's will. It is not, nor could it be in any way, a “coming down” of Allah

---

1. For a discussion of Islam and Christianity, see K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2013), 225–57.

## The Faithful Apologist

himself. To come down is beneath Allah; it would mar and negate His transcendent character.

Not so with the true and triune God. Not only *does* He come down to us, but He does so without changing His glorious character in any way. The true God is not, so to speak, “imprisoned” by His character, as in Islam. Instead, He can express that character in time and space, without denying or negating it. This is the glory of God’s condescension to us, centrally in His Son.

### THE WORD OF CREATION

As we open our Bibles to the first few pages and sit back for a minute to consider what is happening in the garden as God speaks to Adam and Eve, we will recognize that what God is doing there is nothing short of remarkable and astonishing.

When we read those first words of Scripture, “In the beginning, God . . .,” we recognize that “the beginning” refers us to the beginning of *everything, except God*. “The beginning” is the beginning of all of creation. It is the beginning of time and space, of the heavens and the earth, of light and of darkness, of the waters and the living creatures that dwell in them, of the birds in the sky and the beasts of the field, and, climactically, of man—both male and female (Gen 1:1–31).

When we read those beginning words, we intuitively recognize that God is the one who brings about everything else that is. He is able to do so because, in the beginning, *He already was* (see John 1:1–3). In other words, the *reason* that everything in creation exists is because God, who always exists, brings everything in creation into existence. Those four simple words at the beginning of our Bibles—“In the beginning, God”—have enough content packed into them to occupy us for a lifetime.

The fact that God already exists “in the beginning” means that there is no cause to His existence. He simply *is* (Exod 3:14–16; Rev 4:8). The fact that He simply *is* includes the fact that God is not bound by, or in

## The Divine Persuader

any way dependent on, that which He has created (Acts 17:24; Ps 115:3; 135:6). Because He *is* when everything else comes into existence by His own speech, everything that He speaks into existence is subject to Him, and not vice versa (Neh 9:6). He creates, and He is sovereign over all that He has made (Eph 1:11); and He has made everything (Rev 4:11).

The first thing we see when we open our Bibles, then, is that this God creates everything that is. The Bible tells us that God created the heavens and the earth. Because the earth was originally formless and empty, God began to give it shape and to fill it. The *way* in which God gave shape and fullness to His creation should cause us to pause. The entire first chapter of Genesis is filled with the reality of God *speaking* (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 20, 24, 26). Form and fullness were given to God's creation, in other words, by and through God's very *speech*. Why, we might ask, does God *speak* in order to form and fill His initially formless and empty creation?

It cannot be that God *had to* speak in order to form and to fill His universe. Since He is all-powerful, He could have formed and filled His creation simply by willing it to be. But instead, He *speaks* the form and fullness of creation into existence.

One of the reasons God speaks the form and fullness of creation into existence is to show us, His readers, that He is, in the first place, a God who will condescend to *communicate* to and in His creation. That is, He is not a God who cannot and does not relate to His creation, who stands far off, as it were, and simply *wills* it into existence, ensuring all along that He will not in any way be “touched” by what He has made. From the beginning, God is a *communicating* God, a speaking God, a talking God. From His lofty, infinite, and eternal heights, He comes, and He speaks.

On the sixth day, and immediately after creating man—male and female—in His image, He condescends to speak to them. He tells them—person to person, as it were—what it is that they are created to do:

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

## The Faithful Apologist

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so. (Gen 1:28–30)

As we come to the creation of Adam and Eve, it is “natural” that God would continue to speak. He has been speaking all along. In the account of the creation of creatures made in His image, He speaks first to Himself as He contemplates what it means to create human beings in His image (Gen 1:26). This moment, we should see, is a significant shift in the five-day rhythm of God’s creative activity. Prior to this, God simply spoke, and it was. But now, on the sixth day, we’re told that God communicates with Himself. Why this shift?

Surely one reason for the shift is to indicate to us that God is about to do something in His creation that is wholly unique, something with substantial and eternal consequences. To this point, all that He has created could pass away, including heaven and earth itself. The first five days of creation were, we could say, “God’s days.” They brought about things in the world that had no intrinsic eternal longevity. God could, of course, preserve them as long as He saw fit. Creation, up to day five, could glorify God for as long as God chose to keep it in existence. But there was nothing *in* creation on those first five days that *required* that its existence, now begun, would never cease.

On day six, everything changed. God takes counsel with Himself because, as we will see later from Scripture, the decision to create people in His image will mean that what is made will endure for eternity (e.g., Matt 25:41–46; John 17:3). It is almost as if the triune God is saying to Himself on day six, “Are we sure that we want to create something in our image, so that we will live eternally with them?” This, obviously, was a decision of great moment, of great *eternal* moment; it was a decision fundamentally different from everything else God had thus far decided to create.

## The Divine Persuader

All of this, of course, is given to us in Scripture to highlight the climax of God's creation as He creates Adam from the dust, and Eve from Adam. Once God commits Himself to create something in His image, He commits Himself to a *relationship* that will never end, a relationship with creatures of His who will, in a created and dependent way, be *like Him*.

Light and darkness could not be like Him; sea creatures and birds could not be like Him; livestock and creeping things and beasts could not be like Him. For sure, all that He had made through day five would give abundant testimony to who He is and what He is like (see Ps 19:1–5; Rom 1:20). But nothing thus far could *image* His own, personal character. Since God Himself is *personal* as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, He communicates and has fellowship with Himself according to His personal character, including His mind and will. Through day five of creation, nothing personal has been created. With the creation of Adam, there was now a Person-to-person relationship.

So, God commits Himself to an eternal relationship with those made to be like Him. He creates creatures whose purpose is to *image* or *show* what God Himself is like. He creates creatures who could think, who could make decisions, who could communicate to each other with words, who could rule over other aspects of God's creation. He creates creatures who, for the first time in this process, have the very “breath of life” breathed into them by God, so that by that breath they became “living beings” (Gen 2:7).

The point is that the “living beings” they became were wholly different than the creatures that were previously created. None of the other creatures made were made alive by virtue of God's own in-breathing. Man—male and female—alone was a product of God's own breath. He alone was distinct and set apart by God among all else that God had made. This will be a significant point to remember as we move forward in our discussion of persuasion and apologetics.

God then spoke to those made in His image and told them why they were placed in His creation. Unlike the rest of creation that God had spoken into existence, those made in His image were given commands

## The Faithful Apologist

that only image-bearers could fulfill. Like others in creation, they were told to be fruitful and multiply. But, unlike the rest of creation, they were told to rule over the rest of what God had made. And they were told from what trees they could eat, and from which tree they should not eat. They were given, under God, *responsibility* to obey God in His garden. It was a responsibility that, unlike anything else created, would carry substantial consequences.

The first thing we see “in the beginning,” then, is that God does not simply create from afar. Instead, in the process of forming and filling that which He has created, He introduces the *means* by which He Himself will *relate* to His creation. He *speaks* to and into His creation. And, as this process reaches its high point on day six, He speaks to those made in His image. In that speaking, He has initiated a relationship with our first parents, and through them, with us. That relationship is initiated *because* God, who communicates by speaking, also gives to His image the gift of speech (Gen 2:19–20, 23).

It is crucial for us to see the depth of this truth. God’s own sovereign and wise choice for “connecting” Himself to His creation was, first of all, by way of *speech*. And His own sovereign and wise way of “connecting” Himself to those made in His image was by speaking to them as those who could respond, *by speaking*. *Speech*, in other words, is the first “bridge” God institutes to connect to us; *it is the first God-initiated and God-ordained mode of persuasion*. Our tendency, perhaps, is to take language for granted. Children learn it simply by getting older and watching their parents and others around them speak. It appears to be effortless and natural for them. For most children, the complexities of language do not hinder them. They simply “adapt” to speaking.

But language has an incomprehensible quality about it. It distinguishes human beings from the rest of creation. The mathematical genius Kurt Gödel (1906–78) once quipped, “The more I think about language the more it amazes me that people even understand each other.”<sup>2</sup> This is

---

2. Rebecca Goldstein, *Incompleteness: The Proof and Paradox of Kurt Gödel* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2005), 110.



## The Divine Persuader

exactly right. That we have been created to utter sounds in such a way that it reaches other human beings and provides understanding is, in the end, like the God who speaks, incomprehensible to us.

This initial connection, through speech and language, is initially a gift from God. It is a gift to be used for His glory. So strong is this “word-connection,” that, after the fall into sin, people began to see it as a point of pride:

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.” (Gen 11:1–4)

The gift of speech became a stumbling block for people; it had the potential of creating a mighty monument of pride and self-assurance, against the Lord who had given them that gift in the first place (Gen 11:6). The very thing the Lord made to connect us to Him, was now, after the fall, being used to try to usurp His Lordship. The gift became a curse.

The Lord had to break that universal connection of language so that sinful people would not rise up as *one voice* in their pride against Him. He had to confuse that universal language. The “connection” that language provided for all people now became a series of “disconnections,” as people were scattered according to their language differences.

We see in the New Testament that this confusion of languages begins to be undone on the day of Pentecost. On that day, the Lord gives gifts of languages (i.e., tongues) so that the communication of the gospel is not hindered by all the disparate languages (Acts 2:5–12). The Lord ensures, in the preaching of the gospel, that a language connection would be re-established. Persuasion through language would continue throughout the world as the gospel is proclaimed to all people.

## The Faithful Apologist

The point of the Babel/Pentecost example is that language is a powerful, perhaps the *most* powerful, means of connection that the Lord has made. If we recognize that persuasion includes a *connection* between two (or more) people, *speech* is the initial, powerful “bridge” that God used and uses to *connect* Himself to us, and to connect us to each other. He did not have to speak at all; God does not need any particular means whatsoever to do what He does. But He chose to speak; He condescended to use words, even as Adam and Eve could themselves respond to Him by using words.

The Lord created creatures who could both hear Him and speak to Him. So powerful is this gift of speech, that we should recognize as well that the serpent used God’s gift of language as the means by which to tempt, confuse, and potentially destroy Adam and Eve.

And with that speech, from and to God, there is a God-designed and God-initiated “link” between those made in His image and God Himself. Without that God-ordained “link,” He might have remained in unapproachable light; we may not have known Him at all, nor connected with Him. That which is limited, changeable, and temporal is intrinsically unable to touch that which is infinite, immutable, and eternal. There is no “link” to God unless He first comes down and connects Himself to us. And this “coming down” had its initial focus in God’s very words.

## THE WORD OF THE LORD

As we recognize from the rest of Scripture, God speaking was not simply a random or arbitrary choice He made, as if He had pondered various ways He might relate to us and picked one at random. There is a much richer and deeper reason that God used words “in the beginning” of creation. God relating to us and communicating to us using *words* points us to *the Word Himself*, the one who would come down in history to show us who God is, and to persuade us, in and through His word, to come to Him.

The apostle John, as he pens his Gospel under the inspiration of

## The Divine Persuader

the Holy Spirit, immediately refers us back to those first three words of Scripture, “In the beginning”: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

In referring us back to the beginning, however, he also highlights for us another, primary reason that God uses words to communicate. He uses words, because it is of His very character, as the one who is *with* God and who *is* God, to *be* the Word. John turns our attention to the second person of the Trinity—the Word Himself. He is the one who was there, in the beginning. John tells us that it is the *Word* Himself, the second person of the Trinity, who was “in the beginning with God.”

Not only so, but it is through this Word that all things were made, and “without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind” (John 1:3–4). In other words, it was the Word Himself through whom God the Father (together with the Holy Spirit; see Gen 1:2) created the universe. One of the reasons that God *speaks* creation into existence is because it is through *the Word* that creation comes to be. God communicating and speaking to creation, and climactically to Adam and Eve, points us to the Word, without whom “was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3 ESV).

As John writes his Gospel, the Greek word that he uses for “Word”—*Logos*—already had a long philosophical pedigree. The pre-Socratic philosopher, Heraclitus (535–475 BC), taught that the *Logos* was the one, unchanging aspect to an ever-changing reality. He also believed that the *Logos* was intricately connected to human speech, since it was through speech that we can understand truth.

Philo of Alexandria (20 BC–50 AD), a Hellenistic Jew, incorporated substantial aspects of Greek philosophy into his Jewish theology. He saw the *Logos* as the primary organizing principle of philosophy and of theology, since it was the *Logos* that provided a connecting link between the transcendent God and His creation. These philosophical uses of the notion of *Logos* are variously related to John’s use of that word in Scripture. As we will see in part 2, the notion of *Logos* plays a significant role in persuasion as well.

## The Faithful Apologist

The Holy Spirit was fully aware of (even as He Himself had ordained) the philosophical connotations that the word *Logos* carried as He inspired John to write. But we should not think that it was the *philosophical* use of the concept of *Logos* that was paramount in its use and its meaning in John. There is a use of the notion of *Logos* that goes back further and is more intricately linked than the various philosophical uses of the word in John's day. There is a much more striking (and, to some extent, underappreciated) use of the word that has its roots in the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup>

One of the phrases that occurs frequently in the Old Testament, especially in connection with the prophets, is the phrase “and the word of the Lord came.” As a matter of fact, that (or a similar) phrase occurs 103 times in the Old Testament. But it is instructive to us to note carefully how the phrase is often worded.

For example, the first place that we see this phrase is in Genesis 15:1: “After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.’” If we pause for a minute, we should notice something very telling in this verse. Moses tells us here that “the word of the LORD came to Abram.” Our initial thought might be that Abram simply heard *words* that came to him from the Lord. We might think this would be similar to someone writing us a letter, and we would say, “A letter from my mother came to me.”

But there are clues here that might move our thinking in a different direction. What we're actually told is that “the word of the LORD came to Abram *in a vision*.” What could that mean? Of course, it *could* mean that Abram actually saw the *words* that came to him by way of a vision. This would be analogous to someone saying, “a letter of my mother came to me in a vision.”

But the grammar here might actually lean in a different direction. Even if I could see my mother's letter in a vision, I would more likely say

---

3. The same word, *Logos*, was not used in the Old Testament since the Old Testament was written in Hebrew (and Aramaic), and not in Greek. However, since the same Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of the New Testament also inspired the writing of the Old Testament, language differences are no obstacle to the unity of meaning between the two Testaments.

## The Divine Persuader

something like, “A letter from my mother appeared to me in a vision.” To say a letter *of* my mother *came* to me seems to be an odd way of speaking.

It is possible, given the way this is phrased, that the word of the Lord that came to Abram in a vision was a *person* who Himself spoke the words that Abram heard that day. The notion that *someone came* to Abram is consistent with the biblical idea that the word of the Lord was *sent* to Abram. The vision, in other words, that Abram saw that day might have been a vision of a person who spoke the Lord’s words to Abram. Consistent with this idea is the fact that the person speaking was Himself the *Word* of the Lord, who was sent, and who came and spoke.

Some of what we see in this passage with Abram becomes clearer to us as we move through the Old Testament. Looking at more of these kinds of passages that tell us “the word of the Lord came” begins to show us more clearly how we might want to think about them.

For example, if we pay attention to the way “the word of the Lord” is used in various ways in 1 Samuel 3:1, we can’t help but notice how it could point us to the Word Himself:

The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; *there were not many visions* (emphasis mine).

Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: *The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him* (3:7, emphasis mine).

The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there *he revealed himself to Samuel through his word* (3:21, emphasis mine).

These passages indicate that “the word of the Lord” was inextricably linked to *visions* and *revelations* to Samuel. Perhaps this could mean that what Samuel was meant to see, and what was revealed to him, were *words* that would express to Samuel what he needed to know. It is telling that we are told that the word of the Lord was rare, *not* because the Lord was not *speaking*, but rather because *visions* were rare.

## The Faithful Apologist

We see again here a link between the word of the Lord and a vision. It may very well be that this means a vision of *the Lord*. It is all the more likely, however, given 3:21 above. There we read that the Lord revealed Himself *through His word*. This clause, “through His word” is the *means* the Lord used to reveal Himself.

Thus, “the word of the Lord” could be a personal revelation or vision from God to Samuel; the Lord reveals *Himself* through *the word* of the Lord. These verses in 1 Samuel 3 lead us to conclude that what Samuel eventually received from the Lord was a revelation of the Lord Himself, which could be the person who is *the Word* of the Lord.

In 1 Kings 19, we notice a passage that seems intent on pointing us to a “person-to-person” revelation of “the word of the LORD.” Of Elijah, we read, “There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’” (1 Kgs 19:9). Here it looks like “the word of the LORD” is a person who spoke to Elijah in that cave. The English Standard Version (ESV) translates a clause from the Hebrew that the NIV left out, and thus, shows this more clearly: “And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, *and he said to him*, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’” (ESV, emphasis mine). According to this translation, the word of the Lord that came to Elijah is actually one (“He”) who spoke to him.

While time and space prevent us from reviewing the rest of the 103 passages in the Old Testament that refer to the word of the Lord, if we did, we would see this pattern of personification continue. Before we move on, however, we need to notice another biblical passage that helps us recognize the possibility that “the word of the Lord” might be more personal than linguistic. The call of Jeremiah the prophet provides some clarity about the possible identity of this “Word”:

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” “Alas, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.” But the LORD said to me,

## The Divine Persuader

“Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD. *Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth* and said to me, “I have put my words in your mouth.” (Jer 1:4–9)

Again we see that “the word of the LORD” came, and *He* spoke. This “coming” and “speaking” rules out any idea that what came to Jeremiah was a group of words from the Lord. That which came to Jeremiah *came and spoke*. No inanimate letter could do such a thing. This points us to the possibility of a *personal* manifestation of the Lord Himself, who is present to interact with, and to call, Jeremiah as a prophet.

As a matter of fact, just after “the word of the LORD” speaks to Jeremiah, he immediately responds, “Alas, Sovereign LORD!”<sup>4</sup> This “word of the LORD” who came to Jeremiah and who spoke is Himself, as Jeremiah recognizes, *the Lord God*. There is a seamless transition in the text from “the word of the Lord” who is there and who is speaking to Jeremiah, and Jeremiah’s addressing Him as the Sovereign Lord Himself.

In this one passage we have identified for us one who is both “the word of the Lord” and who, according to Jeremiah, is the Lord God. If we think about this, we can see that it begins to sound uncannily similar to what we have already seen in John 1:1! The one who is the Word, and who is “with God,” is Himself God, who has come down, as the Word, to be with us.

Even more telling and astounding in this passage, especially as we have John 1 in mind, is that the One who is there speaking to Jeremiah, who is initially described as “the word of the Lord,” and also as “the Sovereign Lord,” also *puts out His hand and touches Jeremiah’s mouth*. It seems altogether likely that this “word of the Lord” has come to speak to Jeremiah *in the form of a man* and is standing there to call Jeremiah to his prophetic task, *person to person*.

---

4. The Hebrew is “Adonai Yahweh,” which can also be translated “the Lord God.”

## The Faithful Apologist

This points us to *the* Word Himself, the second person of the Trinity. Here we see one who is *both* “the word of the Lord” *and* who is also “the Lord God.” He is “of the Lord” as one who came and who was sent from God, and He is the Lord God Himself. Here is the One who *was* “in the beginning,” who was both *with* God, and who *was* God. There is a “fromness” of this One who is “of the Lord,” as well as an identity, since He is the Lord. He is the word *of* the Lord, who Himself *is* the Lord.

As we read these many occasions in the Old Testament when “the word of the Lord” comes to various people at different times and places, we should recognize that they are pointing us to the One who would climactically condescend “when the set time had fully come” (Gal 4:4). These numerous passages are meant to thrust our thinking forward as we recognize that this word of the Lord who came and spoke and interacted with so many in the Old Testament, is likely the very same Word—the *Logos*—who became flesh in order to dwell among us *as one of us* (John 1:14).

We will remember that our working definition of persuasion is the discerning and initiating of a *connection* between two or more persons. In this case, a connection is initiated between the triune God and human beings. This connection, we should recognize, is unlike any other. It is unique, because it is between One who is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, and human beings who are finite, temporal, and ever changing. If there was to be *any* communication and connection at all, God Himself would have to build the bridge between Himself and us. And that’s exactly what He did, in most remarkable ways. He did that, by “coming down,” as it were, to His creation. He did that, by speaking in human language. He did that, climactically, by becoming *one of us*! Thus, there is an inextricable link between the *speech* of God, the *Word* of God, and persuasion. God *persuades* us centrally through His speech, His Word, the second person of the Trinity.

Although the Lord’s ultimate and climactic act of persuasion was the miracle of the incarnation, that miracle had persuasive precursors prior to it. In other words, even as the Lord personally and gloriously became



## The Divine Persuader

one of us in the Son, He also personally and gloriously hinted at His incarnation throughout redemptive history.

It may help to see examples of this, as the Old Testament points us to that climactic event of the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity in the New Testament. On a number of occasions, the Old Testament uses the phrase “the angel of the Lord.” In fact, we see this phrase in the Old Testament a total of fifty-six times. One of the first times it is used is when the Lord is dealing with Hagar:

The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. And he said, “Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?” “I’m running away from my mistress Sarai,” she answered. Then the angel of the LORD told her, “Go back to your mistress and submit to her.” The angel added, “I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count.” The angel of the LORD also said to her: “You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers.” She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.” (Gen 16:7–13)

Notice what this angel is doing here. First, He gives a promise to Hagar that only the Lord Himself could give. He says to her, “I will surely multiply your offspring . . .” Whatever we might understand about angels from Scripture, we can certainly recognize that angels do not have the power or prerogative to promise what only God Himself can accomplish.

It should not surprise us, then, when we read that Hagar “gave this name to *the LORD who spoke to her . . .*” Hagar knew to whom she had spoken. She called it “You are *the God* who sees me.” This “angel of the

## The Faithful Apologist

Lord” was no mere angel who appeared to Hagar. The angel of the Lord who came to Hagar is the One who was sent (which is what “angel” means), and is the Lord Himself, and Hagar knew it. This is the second person of the Trinity, the Word, the Son Himself.

In that familiar passage in Exodus 3 when the Lord appeared to Moses in a burning bush to call him to his task, we see the same interplay between the angel of the Lord who is the Lord:

There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.” When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.” “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. (Exod 3:2–6)

We see here again, initially, that “the angel of the LORD” appears to Moses. Immediately after identifying this one who appeared as “the angel of the LORD,” we read that “*the LORD* saw that he turned aside” and then “*God* called to him” (ESV, emphasis mine).

Again, with no indication that there is more than one person speaking from the burning bush, Scripture tells us that Moses is dealing with “the angel of the LORD” who is “the LORD” and is identified as “God.” It is abundantly clear here that the Lord Himself, the “I am who I am,” is present here. This is why Moses is commanded to take off his sandals. Only the presence of the Lord could sanctify and set apart the place where Moses stands. No mere angel can sanctify the earth with His presence. Moses is face-to-face with the Lord on this mountain.

In his discussion of this passage in Exodus 3, the Puritan John Owen (1616–83), draws together these same threads:

## The Divine Persuader

And herein also have we expressed *another glorious appearance of the Son of God*. He who is here revealed is called “*Jehovah*,” verse 4; and he affirms of himself that he is “the God of Abraham,” verse 6; who also describes himself by the glorious name of “*I am that I am*,” verse 14; in whose name and authority Moses dealt with Pharaoh in the deliverance of the people, and whom they were to serve on that mountain upon their coming out of Egypt; . . . And yet he is expressly called an “Angel,” Exod. 3:2,—namely, the Angel of the covenant, the great Angel of the presence of God, *in whom was the name and nature of God*. And he thus appeared that the church might know and consider who it was that was to work out their spiritual and eternal salvation, whereof that deliverance which then he would effect was a type and pledge. . . . and *this was no other but the Son of God*.<sup>5</sup>

Owen here reiterates for us the identity of this one who is the “angel of the LORD.” He is the Lord Himself, *Yahweh*, the “I Am,” even as He is the one who is sent by God to Moses. He is the second person of the Trinity, the Word of God.

This pattern of the “angel of the LORD” who is sent by God, *and who is the Lord*, is repeated numerous times throughout the Old Testament. Is it any wonder, then, that Jesus reminded His hearers, on more than one occasion, that the entire Old Testament spoke of, and pointed to, *Him* (see, for example, John 5:39, 46; Luke 24:27)? Surely, the Lord had been condescending to people in order, personally and persuasively, to *connect* with them throughout redemptive history. The Lord’s own “mode” of persuasion includes not only His *words* and *speech* to His human creatures. He also “comes down” to them as He speaks and acts in order to reveal Himself. Like a parent who stoops down to speak to a young child using the child’s still-infantile sounds and words, the Lord “stoops down” to our level and speaks to us, connecting to us, in order that we might have communion with Him.

---

5. John Owen, “An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” ed. W. H. Goold, vol. 18, *Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1854), 225–26 (emphases mine).

## THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD

There is one more connecting link between (the Son of) God and us that should be highlighted here. We noted above that when God created man—male and female—He determined to create them “in His image.” There is much that can be said about “the image of God,” and we will return to this point later on. Not only has the Son of God condescended, throughout redemptive history, in order to connect Himself with us, but we should also recognize another central truth about the second person of the Trinity that Scripture teaches us.

We have now seen that the Son is the *Logos*, the Word of God Himself. We have also seen that the Old Testament speaks of “the word of the Lord” in a way that may point to the Lord Himself. And we have seen that the “angel of the Lord” in the Old Testament is often the One who is both *sent*, and who is Himself the Lord. What these things reveal, then, is that there is One who is both distinct from God and who is also identical to God.

The different ways in which this One is described—as the Word, as an Angel—causes us to recognize that there is a “from-ness” of this One who is the Lord. Just as a word implies a speaker of that word, so also One who is *the Word* is *from* the One who speaks.

Viewing this with New Testament eyes, we can now see that this points us to the reality that the Son, who is Himself fully God (John 1:1; 8:58) is also, at the same time, the One who, as the Word, reveals to us the “speaker” of that Word. The Son came to do the Father’s bidding, even as He alone is uniquely capable of showing us the Father (see, for example, Matt 11:27; Luke 22:29; John 5:17–37; 6:27, 46; 8:18, 28, 54; 10:18, 29, 37; 14:9–12, 20; 15:1, 26; 18:11; 20:17, 21).

In line with this “from-ness” of the Son (as the Word from the Speaker, as the Angel who is sent), Scripture also designates the identity of the Son as the “image” of the invisible God. Note, in speaking of the beloved Son (v. 14), Scripture gives us this description of Him:

## The Divine Persuader

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Col 1:15–17)

There is in this passage, no doubt, a confirmation that Christ came in the flesh to show us the “invisible God.” But we should not miss the fact that this “image” character of the Son is tied to the fact that “in him all things were created . . .” In other words, there is a close link between what we have seen in John 1:1–3, which affirms the creative activity of the Word, and what we see here in Colossians.

The same kind of relation of the “from-ness” of the Son is expressed in Hebrews 1. In that chapter, the author begins by confirming, from the Old Testament, the fact that the Son Himself is fully God. Thus, he begins with this description of Him:

The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. (Heb 1:3)

Notice, the Son is the “radiance” and the “exact representation” of God’s very being. Both ways of describing Him—a “radiance” and a “representation”—indicate a “from-ness” of the Son. But, lest we think that this “from-ness” would make Him less than fully God, the author leaves no doubt about the Son’s deity:

And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.” In speaking of the angels he says, “He makes his angels spirits, and his servants flames of fire.” But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter

## The Faithful Apologist

of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.” (Heb 1:6–9)

Any Hebrew who knew the Old Testament, as the original recipients of this letter would have, would readily see that this One who is the “radiance” of God’s glory and the “exact representation of His being” is, Himself, *fully* God.

There could be no other explanation for the command (applied to the Son) that the angels were meant to *worship* Him. As the author applies Psalm 45 to the Son, he says, “Your throne, O *God*, will last forever and ever . . .” To command worship of the Son, and to apply the throne of the Old Testament, which is God’s alone, to Him would be nothing short of blasphemy, unless the Son was fully God.

As we see the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writing in Colossians 1 of the Son *as image*, then, we should see again that this is a unique ascription of the Son that both recognizes His “from-ness” in relation to the Father, but also affirms His full and absolute deity. Indeed, the fact that He is, eternally and infinitely, *the Son*, points us immediately to His Father, and helps us see that while each is fully and completely God, the Father is uniquely the one from whom the Son is, and the Son is uniquely from the Father.

As we recognize the Son as the eternal “image of God,” we can see a bit more clearly, perhaps, one of the reasons why the triune God determined to create Adam and Eve, and their posterity, in God’s *image*. The creation of human beings in the image of God was, in part, God’s way of “connecting” us, in a wholly unique way, with Himself. More specifically, as the image of God, human beings are “linked” to the One who is the eternal, infinite, and glorious “*image of the invisible God*”—the Son of God Himself.

The fascinating and intricate theological details that could be pursued in this regard are multifaceted. Without moving too far afield, a couple of quotations at this point are instructive. First, the Puritan

## The Divine Persuader

Matthew Henry (1662–1714), speaking of Adam and Eve in the garden, just after their sin, says:

Observe here, what was the cause and occasion of their fear; they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. It was the approach of the Judge, that put them into a fright and yet he came in such a manner, as made it formidable only to guilty consciences. *It is supposed that he came in a human shape*, and that he who judged the world now, was the same that shall judge the world at the last day, even that man whom God has ordained: he appeared to them now, (it should seem,) *in no other similitude than that in which they had seen him when he put them into paradise*; for he came to convince and humble them, not to amaze and terrify them.<sup>6</sup>

Note what Henry says here. It was the Judge, the Son of God, who came to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, walking in the garden, coming to judge them. He came in human form and, according to Henry, it was this same One, in the same form, who put Adam and Eve into paradise. In other words, Henry is recognizing that, since the Son is *from* the Father, since He is the One who is *sent*, since He is the One who permanently takes on a human nature at the incarnation, it was *He* who came to Adam and Eve, in a temporary human form, “in the beginning.” The persuasion of God’s speech, in other words, has always had its focus in the Son, who is the Word, the Angel, the Image of the invisible God.

Similarly, the Puritan Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), in defending the title of the “Word” with respect to the Son, understands Genesis 1 like this:

When I came to the creation, as in Gen. 1, from whence this title [i.e., Word] is given him, as by comparing John and Moses appears,

---

6. Matthew Henry, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, ed. G. Burder and J. Hughes, vol. 1, (Philadelphia: E. Barrington and G. D. Haswell, 1828), 41 (emphases mine).

## The Faithful Apologist

I considered, whether God, by a word within himself, did speak it as in *corde* (in the heart). Now so he had said, “Let there be light,” and that from everlasting; and therefore why may we not suppose it to have been uttered at the beginning of every day’s work? *And that voice being a creature, whether that clothing with words at creation, shewed not that Christ was to be clothed on with a creature, to speak God’s mind unto us creatures, and that he had so undertaken, as being that Wisdom who had sustained it in God’s purpose, and now appeared to execute it.*<sup>7</sup>

For Goodwin, it was the Word Himself who took on a human voice in order to speak to God’s human creatures in the beginning. That act, in Genesis, according to Goodwin, looks forward to the time, after and because of the fall, when the Word would permanently unite Himself to our human nature. In that union of natures, the eternal “Image” unites with the created image. In that union, persuasion reaches its historical climax.

Now we should ask what it is that this Angel, this Word, this Image, this Son, this one who is Jesus Christ, came to reveal. Did He come only to reveal Himself?

As we have already mentioned, Jesus defined His own ministry in the context of His Father. For example, amid intense opposition and rejection from so many (Matt 11:18–24), Jesus turns to His Father with these words:

At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.” (Matt 11:25–26)

Amid many rejections, Jesus turns to His Father with thanksgiving, because He sees that rejection in light of His Father’s sovereign plan.

---

7. Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1863), 551 (emphasis mine).



## The Divine Persuader

But then Jesus makes a statement that could easily serve as a summary of His entire messianic ministry:

All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (Matt 11:27)

This statement is as clear a declaration of Jesus's own divine identity in relation to His Father as any in Scripture. In this statement, Jesus claims exclusive knowledge of His heavenly Father, and that knowledge is reciprocated by His Father.

What Jesus says here (and it appears that He is speaking to His disciples at this point) is that whatever His Father has planned, whatever He has willed, has been handed over to Him, as the Messiah, the one who was sent to do the Father's will. In handing all things over to Jesus the Messiah, the Father has given His Son the authority and prerogative of choosing to reveal to whomever He wishes the knowledge of the Father and the Son.

This is a momentous statement in the life and ministry of Christ. It defines Christ's ministry as both *from* the Father, whom the Son alone knows intimately, and *to* His people, for whom eternal life is to know the Father and the Son (John 17:3). He is the "connection" between the Father and us. Is it any wonder, then, given what Jesus has said here to His disciples, that we sense His frustration toward Philip in the upper room?

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves." (John 14:8-11)

## The Faithful Apologist

Unless we recognize that the One who, from the beginning, was *sent and* came to reveal to us both Himself and His Father (through the Holy Spirit; see, for example, Matt 1:18, 20; 3:16; 12:18, 28), we miss the depth and scope of the ministry of the Son. Not only so, but we miss the Lord's own design of divine persuasion.

His was a Trinitarian ministry, from the beginning. It was a ministry designed, from eternity past, so that the One sent would, "when the set time had fully come" (Gal 4:4), reveal Himself and His Father, through the Spirit, to those who would repent and believe, according to God's sovereign plan.

We may have forgotten by this point why it is important to highlight the identity of this "word of the Lord," this "angel of the Lord," this "image of the invisible God," this "Word," in the Old Testament and into the New.

It began, we will remember, with God Himself *speaking* creation into existence. That speaking of God in those six days reached its climax in His speaking to Adam and Eve, and since they alone were made in His image, *they could speak back to Him*. The connection, the link, between God and His human creatures was, in the first place, a connection of the *word*, of speech. God's own condescension, by which He establishes a relationship to Adam and Eve, is, initially, a condescension of the *word*.

We then noted that this *Word*, by which the Lord condescends, is in the first place, the second person of the Trinity. This is John's point as he begins to write his Gospel. The "Word" that is *from God* is, first of all, not a linguistic phenomenon, but is, in the first place, a *person*, the person of the Son of God.

The apostle John, no doubt because he would have known the Scriptures (our Old Testament) so well, would have recognized that this *Logos* who is the Son of God is the same one who was active and appearing throughout redemptive history. He was the one who would appear, temporarily and on occasion, in the form of a man, in order to show to the saints of the Old Testament that He would one day come, finally and climactically, both to reveal who God is, and to save His people from their sins (Matt 1:21).

## The Divine Persuader

The one whose name would be Emmanuel, God with us, is the same one who was “God with us” in the Old Testament as well. When He permanently took on a human nature, His status as Emmanuel was permanently put in place, from that time into eternity. From that time forward, the dwelling place of God would be with us, supremely so in the new heavens and the new earth (see John 14:23; Rev 21:3).

The importance of language can hardly be overestimated as a means of connection and thus of persuasion. Anyone who has traveled to a foreign country recognizes the crucial need to communicate in the same language whenever possible. Any parent, to use another example, knows it is sometimes best to condescend to speak simple language with a child in order to communicate.

But think of how much more effective it would be if, in a foreign country, for example, you could become *one of them*. Instead of entering that country as a native of your own, imagine the connection you could make if you suddenly became one of their own. Or, as a parent, imagine how you could more effectively communicate with and persuade your child if you could actually become like him. This, we should see, is exactly what the Lord Himself has done. Not only has He personally and perpetually *spoken* to us, but He has, in the Son, *become one of us* in order to draw us to Himself.

The Lord God, who is all-powerful and who can do whatever He pleases, might have connected with us in any number of ways. Our minds are too feeble and short-sighted to understand what is possible for Him. He sovereignly chose, however, to connect with us *by appearing as, and eventually becoming, one of us*, even as He remains who He eternally is. Truly, this is the ultimate act of persuasion; the Son of God became one of us!

Again, the god of Islam *could not* do such a thing; it would be seen to be beneath him. But the true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is fully able to become one of us, in the person of the Son, without in any way giving up or denying who and what He is as God. This is a remarkable truth. It is a truth that no one else has even imagined (1 Cor 2:9). It is

## The Faithful Apologist

a truth that no other religion can even approach. It is the glorious and majestic truth of God's condescension to us.

That condescension, we can now see, is God's utter, and finally incomprehensible, *way of persuasion*; it is God's way of drawing people to Himself. He comes to us—*sent* as the Angel; *speaking* as the Word; *revealing* as the Image—and He communicates to us the glory of the triune God in the gospel. He does this, not simply by *speaking*, as wonderful as that is, but by coming down to us and speaking *as one of us* (Heb 1:1–2).

The spoken word “in the beginning” is the “Word of the Lord” in redemptive history, and is the “Word made flesh” in the New Testament. From the beginning, God connects Himself to us through the Word. He connects Himself to us, and in so doing He changes hearts that oppose Him to hearts that long to please Him. Our triune God is, and has been from the beginning, a God of glorious *persuasion*, from the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit.

As we consider the importance of persuasion, especially as it relates to our defense of Christianity, we only properly consider it when we see the triune God as the initiator and sustainer of persuasion. He *spoke* in order to connect Himself to us. He spoke in and by His Word, the second person of the Trinity, apart from whom there can be no proper connection to God. Persuasion begins with the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who “stooped” to speak and to make a connection to us.

As we consider three aspects to persuasion in part 2, we will need to remember that the Lord, who used words and *the Word* (*Logos*) to connect with those made in His image, draws people to Himself through His Son, who is the Word. He gives us His Word through the Word of God in Scripture, and He connects us to His Word through the Spirit. Persuasion, then, is *God's* way of drawing us to Himself. He does not simply and only *speak* the truth (which He certainly does), but He acts to enter our world, *as one of us*, so that we might be able to enter His world of eternal redemption.

This is the persuasive task of every Christian. We want to discern and initiate a “connection” between us and our audience—“Enter their

## The Divine Persuader

world,” as it were—in order to bring them into the “world” of the gospel and its truth. Thus, we want to choose and use words that have the potential to *connect* to those to whom we speak; we want to avoid words that will *repel* them.

Maybe an extreme example will help clarify this need for persuasion. Suppose you were to approach an unbeliever, even an unbelieving friend, and say, “By the way, Christianity teaches that if you don’t repent and believe in Christ, you will suffer in hell for eternity.” There is nothing false about this; Christianity teaches this. You have certainly told your friend the truth, but how persuasive is it?

I remember hearing someone years ago labeling this kind of truth-telling as “the burp effect.” Instead of trying to connect and persuade others, we “burp” the truth out. As with a burp, we feel much better, but the other person is offended! Persuasion seeks to avoid the burp effect. It assumes the truth of the gospel but seeks to communicate it with wisdom so that, instead of using words that can easily offend and put off, we try to connect the truth with needs, ideas, and concepts that they already have or accept.

Even as the Lord has connected Himself to us, in and through His Word, and supremely in His incarnation, we hope to learn to employ persuasive words to connect others to the Word Himself. This is a connection that will eternally persist, and it is a connection that, since the entrance of sin, comes in the midst of a war.



## TWO

---

# *The* DIVINE *Defender*

---

Persuasion is not primarily a technique, if by technique we mean a way of manipulating circumstances in order to get what we want. It runs much deeper than that. To use a biblical word, persuasion is an application of biblical *wisdom*. Biblical wisdom seeks to take biblical truth and communicate it in a way that connects to a particular need, idea, or situation of life. Because our lives are filled with so many different circumstances and contexts, biblical wisdom seeks to discern those contexts and circumstances so that what we say might address the actual situation (Col 4:5).<sup>1</sup>

Neither is persuasion primarily focused on *us*. Given that persuasion's goal is to establish a *connection* between two or more parties, God is the initial persuader. God was the first to connect with something outside of Himself, through His act of creation. Specifically, He speaks *to* and *with* the ones that He has made in His own image. God is the ultimate creator and sustainer of words and their meanings. When He tells Adam and Eve to subdue the earth or not to eat from the forbidden tree, He is perfectly clear in what He says, and Adam and Eve understand Him.

---

1. For a helpful, brief explanation of "Wisdom Literature" in Scripture, see Robert B. Hughes and J. Carl Laney, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*, The Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 676.

## The Faithful Apologist

Once they hear God's words, Adam and Eve are responsible to abide by them. So, from the beginning, the One who is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable "stoops down" to speak to His human creatures, and in that way, He initiates fellowship with them in the garden. They are inextricably linked to Him because *He* connects *them* to Himself. They are immediately drawn to Him by His presence and His speech to them. The Lord creates and uses language to persuade.

### CRAFTINESS AND CONFLICT

As we know all too well, the connection that God established with Adam and Eve did not remain in its pristine state. When there was no sin, the fellowship between God and those made in His image was unbroken, without blemish or stain. There was clear and untainted communication between the Lord and His human creatures.

It is significant that, on the day when Adam and Eve decided to break the perfect fellowship that God had established with them, the way in which Satan tempted them was to twist *the words* that God had spoken:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "*Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'*" (Gen 3:1, emphasis mine)

We should pause to ask why Genesis 3 begins the way it does. Why are we told that the serpent was "more crafty" than any of the wild animals the Lord had made? This statement is not meant to be merely descriptive. It is meant, rather, to help us interpret everything else that Satan, via the serpent, has to *say*. It is the craftiness of the serpent, in other words, that motivates him to ask Eve that first question. It is a question about God's *words*.

The first thing this crafty serpent does with Eve is to cause her to reconsider what God had said. He wants Eve to reinterpret God's own



## The Divine Defender

words to her and Adam. The serpent, no doubt, knew the prohibition that God had imposed on Adam and Eve in the garden. But he does not come to them and first say, “Eat from the forbidden tree!” There is no “craftiness,” no persuasive element, in that approach.

Instead, he wants Eve to consider again the forbidden tree. He wants her to go back to those *words* from God and mull them over in her own mind. So, he plants the seed in Eve’s mind that God is a *restricting* God, that He is One who constrains and confines their freedom. He wants Eve to tell him just exactly *how* constraining the Lord is. “Is He so constraining on your freedom,” he says in effect, “that you cannot eat from any of these beautiful and marvelous trees?” In this initial part of the temptation, Eve’s response to him is appropriate:

The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”  
(Gen 3:2–3)

Eve’s statement, however, comes in the context of the serpent’s crafty question, a question that could be less craftily stated this way: “How much has the Lord constrained your freedom?” Given the serpent’s question, Eve’s sights are now set on God’s prohibition; she is forced by the question to consider why God has restricted her at all. “Why this one tree?” she likely begins to think to herself.

Eve’s response properly sets the parameters of God’s command. She rightly understands that the Lord has provided boundaries for her and Adam in the garden, boundaries that were meant to show Adam and Eve’s obedience to the Lord.

They were supposed to subdue the earth, under God’s own rule over them. The Lord’s dual commands—to subdue the earth *and* not to eat from the forbidden tree—were designed to display God’s sovereignty over them. Even as they subdue the earth and have dominion over God’s creation, they are also commanded not to eat of the forbidden tree.

## The Faithful Apologist

Their responsibility to “subdue” and “have dominion” (ESV) over the earth (Gen 1:28), in other words, is a responsibility *under* God; it is a responsibility *within* the boundaries that God has set. It is not a responsibility without limits.

But the crafty serpent wants Eve to see that this rule is *unduly* restrictive. As a matter of fact, he now says to them, if their rule could extend *beyond* God’s restrictions, they would, in fact, be more like God Himself:

“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Gen 3:4–5)

This, for Eve, and Adam who was “with her” (Gen 3:6), was what turned Satan’s deception into Adam and Eve’s separation from the fellowship they had enjoyed with the Lord. The craftiness of Satan, appealing to their “restricted” life, and convincing them that they would be more “like God,” pushed Adam and Eve beyond their God-given boundaries. From that point on, God’s creation would never be the same. Instead of an intrinsic *connection* between God and Adam and Eve, shame and brokenness entered in:

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. (Gen 3:7–8)

The curse that the Lord now has to bring into creation, and into His fellowship with Adam and Eve, is the beginning of a spiritual war that will continue until the end of time:

So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will

## The Divine Defender

crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” (Gen 3:14–19)

This is the most devastating moment in all of history. All devastations after flow from this one. From this point forward, there will be pain and toil for Adam and for Eve. Those things that would have come to them naturally, before their sin, now come with great effort, great agony, and great resistance. From now on, the whole creation will be “subjected to frustration” (Rom 8:20), as creation is now “groaning as in the pains of childbirth” (Rom 8:22).

Most centrally, we see that from this point on, the Lord puts enmity between the offspring of Satan and the offspring of the woman. In other words, because of Adam and Eve’s sin, the Lord declares war against Satan and his children.

Note, for example, how Jesus refers back to this event in one of His encounters with the Pharisees:

Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to

## The Faithful Apologist

carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (John 8:42–44)

Jesus is reminding His audience that all lies, all murder, all sin, stems from that first lie and murder; it all comes from Satan's success in turning Adam and Eve away from God.

From the moment when Adam and Eve sinned, the "offspring of the serpent" continues the war that began on that day. When they were created, Adam and Eve were given life, and were promised life as long as they did their work and lived their lives within God's own design for His people and His garden. To disobey would bring death. In their disobedience, they chose lies and death over life and truth.

Those who are aligned with the serpent carry out his desires. They show themselves to be his offspring, Jesus says, through their lies and their opposition to life itself. They are, at root, opposed to God Himself. The very *connection* that God had established through His word in the garden was "blocked" and hindered through the false words of the serpent. Those words were used to destroy the connection God had established. Once Adam and Eve believed those words, rather than the Lord's words, they no longer wanted to be connected to the Lord; they hid from Him when they heard Him walking in the garden.

When Jesus refers to Satan as a "murderer from the beginning," He is referring to the discord and destruction that followed Adam and Eve after their sin. Not only did Satan lie to Adam and Eve, but once they determined to follow his words rather than the Lord's, death came to their family (Gen 4:1–17). The entrance of sin into the world brought death to all (Rom 5:12). The Lord is the giver of life; sin brings death to all and seeks to destroy the good gifts that the Lord has given to His creation, and to those made in His image. The connection the Lord initially established is now broken because of sin.

## THE DIVINE WARRIOR

There is an extremely important pronouncement in Genesis 3:15 that serves to set the agenda for all of redemptive history:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

Because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, the Lord promises *enmity*. The Hebrew word means “hostility.” What was previously peaceful and tranquil has now become hostile. This hostility will be between those who are the offspring of the woman and those who are the offspring of the devil (see, for example, Gen 26:3–5 and John 8:42–44).

It is important to notice that this hostility is put in place *by the Lord Himself*. He says to Adam and Eve, “I will put enmity . . .” Now that sin has entered God’s otherwise good creation, the Lord initiates, in effect, a *war* between the offspring of the two “families.” As Scripture goes on to teach us, the Lord Himself is committed to fighting that war, even to *leading* the fight of the woman’s offspring. He Himself is the Divine Warrior, who fights to defend His holy name.

### The Divine Warrior in the Old Testament

It is because of the enmity which was brought about by the sin of Adam and Eve that the reality of, and need for, a defense—an apologetic—comes into play in Scripture. But it is important to recognize that the defense of the Lord against sin in the Old Testament has its primary focus, not in Israel, but in God.

One of the first explicit texts dealing with the Lord confronting and battling His enemies is in the exodus. The children of Israel were slaves in Egypt. The time came for the Lord to set them free from their slavery (see Gen 15:13–14). We see in the opening chapters of Exodus that the Lord chose a mediator, Moses, to bring the people out of Egypt (Exod 3).

However, we also see that it was the Lord Himself who did battle

## The Faithful Apologist

against Pharaoh. For example, in the plagues that were sent to Egypt, we see the Lord sending those plagues in order that Pharaoh would relent and release the people of Israel. Those plagues culminated in the Passover, after which Pharaoh relented and let Israel go:

All the Israelites did just what the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron. And on that very day the LORD brought the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions. The LORD said to Moses, “Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether human or animal.” Then Moses said to the people, “Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because *the LORD brought you out of it with a mighty hand.* (Exod 12:50–13:3, emphasis mine)

As the Lord engages the battle against sin, and against those who were His enemies, *He* is the one who is defending His honor, even as He uses Moses (and others) to carry out His plan. It is, centrally, the Lord who is the Divine Warrior. He is the Apologist. The “defense” or apology of the exodus was the Lord’s doing, first and foremost.

The word *apology* or *apologetics* is not a word invented by theologians or academics. It is actually a word that the Lord Himself uses in Holy Scripture (for example, in 1 Pet 3:15, the word translated as “give an answer” is the Greek word *apologia*). It is a word that means “to defend,” and it assumes the reality of opposition or attack. To “apologize” in this sense does not mean saying you’re sorry. It means defending what you believe in the face of questions, or of someone who opposes what you believe, or of someone who might attack your Christian faith. An “apology” is a defense, and it assumes some kind of hostility. In Scripture, it assumes a war.

We see this “defense” as well in the conquest of Canaan. Notice:

Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up

## The Divine Defender

to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” “Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?” The commander of the LORD’s army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so. Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. Then the LORD said to Joshua, “See, *I have delivered Jericho* into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.” (Josh 5:13–6:2, emphasis mine)

This passage shows us explicitly who it is that is leading the battle against sin, and against the Lord’s enemies. It is the Lord Himself. Joshua sees a warrior in front of him. It is natural for him to ask for whom this warrior plans to fight: “Are you for us or for our enemies?” What Joshua expected was surely not the answer he received. He had asked the wrong question. He hadn’t discerned the identity of this warrior.

This warrior was not merely a member of any army. Instead, this was the commander of the Lord’s army, and in that sense, He was on neither side. As a matter of fact, this is the Lord of hosts Himself, who has condescended to fight the battle. This is why Joshua was commanded to take off his sandals. Only the presence of the Lord Himself could so sanctify the ground that it was offensive to bring the dirt of the world into it; his sandals must be removed (see also Exod 3:5–6).<sup>2</sup>

As the commander, the Lord makes clear whose battle Joshua is fighting, and whose victory it would be: “See, *I have delivered Jericho* into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.” It is the Lord who

---

2. Though the identity of this Divine Warrior is disputed by some, it seems clear to me that this is the Lord, at least because (1) the command of the Lord for Joshua to take off his sandals *due to the hallowed ground* is identical to that of Exodus 3:5, where the Lord appears to Moses. As with Moses, Joshua falls down in reverence. That reverence would be out of place, at minimum, if this were a creature. And (2), it is clearly said that it is “the Lord” who is speaking and who delivers Joshua from Jericho.

## The Faithful Apologist

delivered Jericho to Joshua. Joshua was the Lord's instrument to fight the battle, but the battle was the Lord's, and He was the victor.<sup>3</sup>

This pattern of apologetics—defending the Lord's honor against sin—in the Old Testament is that the Lord is the Defender, He is the Warrior, and He often uses others to accomplish His purposes (2 Kgs 19:34; 20:6; Ps 43:1; 72:4; 74:22; Isa 37:35; 38:6). But we should not miss the point that, ever since the entrance of sin, there has been a defense, an apologetic, a confrontation of the Lord in His righteousness against sin and rebellion. The point of this confrontation is so that the nations would know that the Lord alone is God. Justice is exacted and executed by God, specifically to make this clear.

One more Old Testament confrontation in which the Lord fights the battle will set the stage for our move into the New Testament:

Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, "I will set up my camp in such and such a place." The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: "Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there." So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places. This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, "Tell me! Which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?" "None of us, my lord the king," said one of his officers, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom." "Go, find out where he is," the king ordered, "so I can send men and capture him." The report came back: "He is in Dothan." Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city. When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh no, my lord!

---

3. For an extensive list of passages in Scripture that refer to the Lord's war against sin and thus to apologetics, see K. Scott Oliphint, *The Battle Belongs to the Lord* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2003), 195–201.



## The Divine Defender

What shall we do?” the servant asked. “Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed, “Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see.” Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (2 Kgs 6:8–17)

Here we see the Lord fighting, but we see more clearly that the battle the Lord fights is a *spiritual* battle, with spiritual forces arrayed to defeat the Lord’s enemies. These forces are every bit as real as the army surrounding Elisha, but their presence can only be seen by those whose eyes are opened by the Lord Himself. Thus, they are spiritually discerned. Clearly the Lord, as the Captain of His army, has arrayed a spiritual army so that His enemies might eventually be subdued and defeated.

## The Divine Warrior in the New Testament

The most quoted psalm in the New Testament is Psalm 110.<sup>4</sup> That psalm begins with a command from “the LORD” (Hebrew: *Yahweh*) to “my lord” (Hebrew: *Adonai*):

The LORD says to my lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” (Ps 110:1)

Here David tells us that the LORD, or *Yahweh*, grants to “my lord,” or *Adonai*, the privilege of sitting at His right hand until *Adonai*’s enemies are made a footstool for His feet. This is a coronation psalm. It is *Yahweh* recognizing and affirming the cosmic authority of David’s lord, *Adonai*. To sit at the right hand of *Yahweh* meant to sit with Him in the place of cosmic authority.

Clearly, this coronation is given to *Adonai* with a view toward warfare. *Adonai* is given a place of authority, with *Yahweh*, so that *His enemies*

---

4. Quoted or referenced in Matt 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42–43; Acts 2:34–35; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20–22; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13; 2:8; 5:6; 7:17, 20–21, 24, 28; 8:1; 10:12–13; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22; Rev 6:17; 19:14, 17–18.

## The Faithful Apologist

will be subdued. The reign of *Adonai* has a specific purpose in view. It is initiated so that all of His enemies will be conquered. The reign of *Adonai*, with *Yahweh*, is intended to reverse the curse of sin that began in Genesis 3.

But this reign also has an *end* in view. *Adonai* is to sit at *Yahweh*'s right hand *until* their enemies are all subdued. That is, He will sit there and reign with *Yahweh* until the warfare is over.

The author to the Hebrews frames much of his discussion around this same psalm. He says:

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. (Heb 1:3–4)

The author has in mind here both the *nature* of the Son, as well as His historic *work*. His nature is nothing short of full deity. As the radiance of God's glory and as the exact representation of God's nature, He is the One who is *from* God and who *is* Himself God. This is why, for example, the author, in verse 6, applies Deuteronomy 32:43 to the Son ("Let all God's angels worship him").<sup>5</sup> As we have seen, the only one who could be worthy of worship in all of Scripture is God Himself. The author to the Hebrews wants to make clear, from the beginning of his epistle, that the Son is God, and is therefore worthy of worship.

But Hebrews also wants us to see that the Son, even as He is always worthy of worship as God, nevertheless "became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs." That is, the author is affirming that it was *the Son* who came to earth to do His work perfectly, and by completing that work He proved that He was, in fact,

---

5. There are some textual technicalities in this verse. For a concise explanation, see Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 70–71.

## The Divine Defender

*the Son*. By virtue of His perfect obedience, He “inherited” the name that was His from all eternity (see also Rom 1:1–4). In other words, the Son, who is fully God, came as the *God-man*, and perfectly obeyed, that He might earn and merit that which was His in the first place.

Once He perfectly performed the work He was given, He “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” In other words, what the author is telling us is that it was the person and work of *the Son* that was the fulfillment of Psalm 110. At the completion of His earthly task, He was crowned the King. All authority in heaven and on earth was given to Him (Matt 28:18). He alone was worthy to break the seal and open the scrolls because He was slain, and He purchased for God with His blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Rev 5:9).

The purpose of the Son’s reign, as expressed in Psalm 110, is so that His enemies would be subdued. And there will come a time when every enemy will, in fact, be subdued:

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:26–28)

Notice how Paul refers us in this passage to another, similar psalm, Psalm 8:6, in order to affirm the Son’s rule and reign. But he also affirms that the Son will reign until the last enemy is destroyed. At that time, the Son (*Adonai*) will hand the kingdom to His Father (*Yahweh*), since the task of subduing His enemies will finally be complete. At that time, God will be “all in all” because sin will be dealt its final death blow, and death will be no more.

In all of this, it is the Divine Warrior, the Son of God Himself, who is reigning and ruling as His enemies are being subdued. The goal of that reign is to squash the rebellion of sin and destruction, which leads

## The Faithful Apologist

to death, and to promote the reality of life and peace over the entire creation. That life and peace, as we see from the New Testament, can only come by way of the Son (see, for example, Luke 1:79; 2:14; 19:38; John 1:4; 3:36; 5:21). Apart from the Son, there is only death.

So the Son, in whom alone is life, is now reigning at the right hand of His Father, as His enemies are in the process of being subdued by Him. He will, eventually, subdue them all, as He fights the cosmic battle against the powers and principalities in the heavenlies (Eph 6:12).

One of the most incredible realities of this war is that the Lord uses His church to fight; He allows us to be engaged in the defense of the faith. Weak and limited vessels of His are the army He has chosen to use in His fight against sin and death.

### The Divine Warrior in Our Lives

Christian apologetics recognizes the spiritual war that the Lord Himself initiated when sin entered the world. It is a war that rages in the cosmos. The goal of apologetics is to defend the honor and glory of the Lord, as we fight with and for Him, in the midst of this cosmic war.

Perhaps one of the most familiar “war” passages in the New Testament is Ephesians 6:10–17. This passage helps us see how we are to prepare for the spiritual battle, for the apologetic task of defending the faith. There the apostle Paul describes what it means for us to go “onward” as “Christian soldiers.” Notice how he begins this discussion of spiritual warfare:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. (Eph 6:10–11)

The strength needed for the battle can only be found “in the Lord and in *His* mighty power.” The battle, in other words, is *His* battle; it is a battle that has its focus in the strength and power of the Lord Himself.

In fighting the battle, we are to be fitted with “the whole armor of

## The Divine Defender

God.” This highlights again that the battle is not, in the first place, *our* battle, but it is God’s battle. If we think our armor is meant to be produced by us, we will not stand in battle. Any armor that is man-made is too weak and frail to resist the opposition. As we will see, the armor that we must wear in battle is nothing less than *God’s* armor. No other armor has the strength to withstand the schemes of the devil.

What is this armor that God provides for His church? We will have more to say about this as we move along in our discussion of persuasion and apologetics. As many have noted, all of the different elements of God’s armor are *defensive*, except one. All of them, except the last one, are meant to *protect us* rather than to be used to *confront* those who would oppose the Lord. The clear indication from the description of this armor is that there will be constant attacks from the enemy. We will need to be sufficiently dressed for this continual and perpetual onslaught.

So, says Paul, we are to, “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place” (Eph 6:14). We see in this verse that Paul is referring us to Isaiah 11:5. This chapter in Isaiah is a prophecy about the coming King. It foretells the righteous reign of the Lord Jesus Christ:

But with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.  
(Isa 11:4)

Here we are told of this root from the stem of Jesse (v. 1), who is the One who will judge the earth (v. 4). But He will not judge by what His eyes see (v. 3). Instead, He will judge the earth in righteousness (v. 4). Obviously, from this passage, the Messiah-King will be engaged in warfare; He will “strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.” Just after this affirmation of the King’s warfare, Isaiah notes, “Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist” (Isa 11:5).

## The Faithful Apologist

This is the passage that the apostle Paul alludes to in his initial description of our spiritual armor. But there is a significant and substantial difference between Paul's use of this passage, and the passage as Isaiah gives it to us. *In Isaiah, the armor described is not in the first place our armor, but it is the armor worn by the Divine Warrior, the Messiah-King.* It is armor that Christ wears as He carries out His cosmic reign at the right hand of His Father.

Any recipient of Paul's letter to the Ephesians who knew the Old Testament would have readily recognized that the armor that *we* are to put on is the selfsame armor that the Messiah, Christ Himself, put on in order to rule and to reign amid the spiritual battle. Our armor, in other words, is really His armor; it is the armor that we wear *because* He wears it. We fight, only because He does. We defend the faith, only because He is the Divine Apologist.

This serves to bolster our recognition that the battle we fight is, in the first place, *His* battle, not ours. It reminds us that the only reason we have spiritual armor to wear is because our Savior-King first wore it and continues to wear it as He reigns on high. It also reminds us that as we fight the battle—as we engage in Christian apologetics—He is the One who leads the charge, and who accomplishes whatever victories we might experience (see Josh 5:13–15).

The first element of our armor, says Paul, is the “belt of truth” buckled around our waist. We know, from John 17:17, that our offensive piece of armor is the Word of God, which is the truth itself. In that sense, the first and last piece of spiritual weaponry that we put on is *truth*. The truth must bracket all other armor; it surrounds and encompasses the whole outfit.

But the belt of truth must be somehow different from the Word of God, which is truth itself. What might that difference be? We have some clue to the answer to that question when we recognize that Paul is referring us to Isaiah 11:5: “Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.” The prophet Isaiah uses a word that is translated “righteousness.” This word also carries the idea of that which is just and

## The Divine Defender

proper in the world. In other words, the “belt of truth” that is our first piece of armor must include a commitment to righteousness and justice. It is, in that sense, the *application* of what God says in His Word to the way in which we view the world.

What Paul seems to mean by the “belt of truth,” then, is that we are to view the world that God has made through the principles of His Word. Righteousness and justice are defined and applied according to biblical principles. This would include, at least, the truth that Christ is now on the throne, reigning in and over the world, even though it may appear to us at times that He is not in control (see Heb 2:8). We don’t define justice and righteousness according to worldly principles; we define them according to the Word of God and the reign of Christ as He sits on His Father’s throne.

When we understand justice and righteousness in this way, we make significant progress toward a biblical understanding of suffering. Such an understanding is crucial when we are engaged in spiritual warfare. Even when it appears that the wicked prosper and those who follow Christ are being subdued, with the “belt of truth” firmly tied around our waists, we recognize that Christ has already won the victory for His people. Even in our sufferings, therefore, we remain “more than conquerors” (Rom 8:37). Even as we suffer—perhaps *especially* as we suffer—we can defend the Christian faith, engaging in the spiritual war that rages in the heavenlies. We can do this because we know, as those who are outside of Christ cannot know, that “our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18).

This “belt of truth” is the first and most basic aspect of our spiritual armor. When we put it on for battle, we commit ourselves to viewing the world through the 20/20 lens of biblical truth. This is a radical commitment, and it requires us to filter the flood of data that enters our sensory world every day. It requires us to take all of the arguments, the essays, the opinions, the beliefs, the theories, the constant flow of information all around us, and to scrutinize them according to what the Lord has said in His Word. It requires, in sum, a biblical view of the world.

## The Faithful Apologist

As with the “belt of truth,” the “breastplate of righteousness” is, in the first place, a piece of armor that Yahweh Himself puts on in order to fight the battle against His enemies (Isa 59:17). This righteousness that the Lord puts on demonstrates His opposition to the injustices and the rebellion of those who fight against Him:

Lead me, LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies—make your way straight before me. (Ps 5:8)

Righteousness, in other words, is a piece of battle armor that stands in bold relief and that brings light against the backdrop of the darkness that surrounds the opposition:

Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. (Isa 9:7)

So also when we don the Lord’s breastplate of righteousness, we fight the battle by exhibiting behavior that conforms to His righteousness. Because there is darkness, we shine the light of the Lord’s holiness; because there is injustice, we seek and support the justice that only the Lord Himself can provide; because people commit themselves to falsehoods (see Rom 1:25), we live the truth (1 John 1:6) as we walk according to the Lord’s instructions (Gal 5:25). Righteousness and justice are defined according to the light of God’s Word, not according to some other human standard.

The next piece of armor that Paul describes is a curious one that has baffled many commentators. What does Paul mean by “your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace” (Eph 6:15)? What, exactly, is this “readiness” that comes from the gospel of peace?

The most likely explanation is that it is the gospel itself that prepares us for the battle into which we are called. Ironically, it is the gospel



## The Divine Defender

of *peace* that prepares us for *battle*. The peace of which Scripture often speaks is the *shalom* of God. We can see this explained succinctly in the so-called “Aaronic benediction” of Numbers 6:24–26:

“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

In this benediction, we have what are called “parallelisms.” This means that there is a repetition of meaning in the various clauses and phrases. So, for example, another way to express the phrase “The LORD bless you” is “The LORD make his face shine on you.” So also, another way to express the wish that “The LORD be gracious to you” is to say, “The LORD . . . give you peace.” Peace, in other words, is a blessing of the Lord, by which He turns His face toward us, by grace, so that the hostility that was between Him and us because of our sin is no longer there. The peace of the Lord, in other words, is His *salvation*, a salvation that comes to us now in and through His gospel of peace. In that gospel, the wall of hostility between a holy God and sinful people is torn down; the barrier is destroyed, and peace between Him and us is given to all who are in Christ.

It is only when we have the belt of truth around our waist and we are wearing the breastplate of righteousness that we understand the cosmic effect of this gospel of peace. The gospel is not simply or only *for us*; it is the gospel whether we affirm it or not. The gospel includes the fact that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ. Paul reminded his readers of this in Ephesians 1:19–23:

That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and

## The Faithful Apologist

appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

The “readiness” of the gospel includes our affirmation and application of the fact that all things have been placed under Christ’s feet because He is the head *over everything*. The battle that we fight, in other words, is always and everywhere fought within *His* realm, and on *His* terms, since He rules over it all. Included in His terms is the fact that His gospel is, as Paul puts it, a “gospel of peace.”

So we prepare to *fight* for *peace* when we recognize that the One on the throne is subduing His enemies so that there will, in the end, be peace (see Luke 2:14). Just as Jesus is the One who came to preach peace to those who were far off and those who were near (Eph 2:17), so also we prepare ourselves for the same task.

This peace that is the focus of the gospel is rich in biblical meaning. It is the *shalom* of the Old Testament. It is a peace that not only means that wars and battles will cease. More importantly, and more deeply, it means that we, and the world, are reconciled to God. The war that we fight, as we are shod with the readiness of the gospel, is not a war that only brings victory. It is a war that brings peace to all of God’s creation. “‘The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,’ says the Lord” (Isa 65:25). It is the final moment of persuasion, as the apologetic battle comes to an end.

Why would the apostle describe the armor of our “readiness” as footwear? There are, perhaps, a couple of biblical ideas at work here. First, in keeping with the theme of God’s rule and reign over all of creation, Isaiah says:

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!” (Isa 52:7)

## The Divine Defender

We will remember that Paul quotes this passage as he argues for the necessity of preachers and of preaching (Rom 10:14–17). The first reason that Paul describes the armor of “readiness” as footwear is because the gospel of peace requires that we *go* in order to communicate it. This aspect of our armor, therefore, highlights the need to go out into the world, into hostile territory, to defend and spread the gospel of peace.

The second biblical idea, which is perhaps at work here, has to do with what footwear sometimes represents in the Old Testament. We will remember, for example, when the Lord appeared to Moses from the burning bush in Exodus 3, the first thing the Lord commanded Moses to do was to remove his sandals (Exod 3:5; see also Josh 5:15). The reason Moses was commanded to remove his sandals was because the presence of the Lord had sanctified the place where He appeared. In other words, Moses was commanded not to bring the dirt of the world into the holy presence of God on that mountain.

When our feet are shod with the readiness of the gospel, the movement is reversed. We move *from* the holy presence of the Lord and *to* the world, in order to engage the battle in the world. To put it in New Testament terms, we respond to, receive and recommit to, the gospel of peace each week in our worship of the Lord within the sanctuary of His people, the church. We then put on our battle boots in order to move from His holy presence in His sanctuary to a hostile and needy world, to fight the good fight. To put it in the language of the Great Commission (Matt 28:19), as we are ready to go from the presence of Christ to the world, we are to take the gospel of peace to all nations in order to make disciples. In that way, it is the gospel of peace that the Lord uses to subdue the world, as He reigns at the right hand of His Father.

Now that we are properly dressed in God’s armor, we are told to “take up the shield of faith.” We should note here that a shield is not, in the strictest sense, something we wear. It is instead something that is meant to “cover” us in battle. In that sense, as we *take up* the shield of faith, it is our faith that protects us, even as we are dressed in God’s armor. The word that Paul uses, which is translated “take up,” is the

## The Faithful Apologist

same word he uses in verse 13 when he tells us to “put on” the full armor of God.

The shield that we use in battle, which is the shield of faith, covers and thus characterizes the rest of the armor that we wear. The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of readiness, all of these are what they are because they have as their focus our trust in Christ. We see the world through the lenses of Scripture because we trust that what we have in our Bibles is the very Word of God. We conform our character to biblical principles of justice and righteousness because we trust that God’s ways and Christ’s own character are alone truly righteous and just. We put on our battle boots of readiness because we trust that the reign of Christ will actually bring about the subduing of His enemies by way of the gospel of peace. Scripture guarantees us that Christ’s enemies will, one day, be entirely subdued (Phil 2:10–11).

In other words, the entirety of our armor is meant to be bathed in the shield of faith. It is our trust in Christ that gives our armor its ability to protect us. Without that trust, we have no truth, there is no righteousness, and we cannot be prepared by and for the gospel of peace.

For example, we have been at pains to highlight the fact that Jesus Christ now rules and reigns at the right hand of the Father. However, “at present we do not see everything subject to them” (Heb 2:8). In order to set firmly in our minds the fact that Christ now reigns, therefore, we need the shield of faith. We trust what God has said.

We see the world, not initially with our physical eyes, but with the eyes of faith as we prepare to engage the apologetic battle. If we divert our attention, if we let down our guard and lay down our shield, then we are ill-equipped to fight the battle. If our shield is down, then our belt of truth is too weak to support us, our breastplate of righteousness is thin and penetrable, and our boots of readiness falter.

This shield of faith, we should note, is able to “extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” This reminds us again that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of

## The Divine Defender

evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12). Even though we engage the battle with other people who oppose our Savior and His reign, we should recognize that the battle rages in the realm of the invisible. It is that realm that supports and encourages the opposition that we face.

Notice that our shield of faith does not simply *stop* the flaming arrows that are fired at us. It is a more effective shield than that. The shield of faith is able to *extinguish* those arrows. It is, as it were, doused in the living water of the gospel so that when the flames hit, they are not only stopped, but they are immediately quenched. The shield destroys the power and ability of the flames to destroy. Instead of the flames spreading, they are snuffed out when we are armed with trust in our heavenly Father and in His Word.

The language that points us to the final two pieces of armor is significant. The command in verse 17 is to “take” the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. Other pieces of armor are to be put on, but here the emphasis is on that which we have *received*.

Paul has already emphasized to the Ephesians that the salvation that we have by grace is a salvation that is a *gift* (Eph 2:1–10). There is nothing we can *do* that will accomplish our salvation. If we are to be saved, *God* must save us.

This is good news in our fight against the Lord’s enemies. At some point, the Lord subdued us with the good news of His gospel. And because *He* is the One that subdued us, He will never let us go (see John 10:29; Rom 8:38–39). Our salvation begins and ends with the Lord’s work. First, He works in history. His death and resurrection were designed to take away God’s wrath and to satisfy His justice. Then, He works in us, changing our hearts of stone to hearts of flesh (Ezek 36:26), and uniting us to His Son.

We engage in persuasive apologetics as those who are servants of the King, and who dwell in His kingdom. We serve Him and dwell there because He has given us entrance and has called us His own.

This is the helmet of salvation. As with the other pieces of armor, it is, in the first place, a piece that the Lord Himself has worn (see Isa 59:17).

## The Faithful Apologist

The Lord's helmet of salvation is one wherein He conquers His enemies. He subdues them by His own power and work.

For us, on the other hand, it is His helmet, and it testifies that He is the One who can subdue His enemies and who alone has the power to accomplish the salvation that is needed. Defense and persuasion are, in the first place, His activities in the spiritual battle.

This helmet of salvation is a piece of armor that has its focus on the head. In Paul's description, it is a helmet *of salvation*. In that sense, it sums up the entire reality of the gospel in our lives. It includes, for example, what we *know*. We know that we are His. We know that we are His because of what He has done in history and in us. And we know that, even in our defense of the faith, the faith that we defend is not ours by right, but is ours by grace. We have received it because He has been gracious to grant it to us. Anyone else who would receive it would and could only do so by His grace.

This should give us confidence in our apologetic. It should embolden us in the fight. We stand where we are, and we are who we are, not because of anything in us, but solely because of Him. As we battle against unbelief, we do so in full recognition that we are recipients of His grace, and that such grace is undeserved.

This keeps us from an arrogant and judgmental spirit in our spiritual fight. It ensures that we fight, not as those who are intrinsically able and equipped, but as those who have received a great gift, and who long for others to receive it as well. The helmet of salvation is an echo of Paul's confidence:

That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, *because I know whom I have believed*, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day. (2 Tim 1:12)

The last piece of armor, another piece which we are to “take” and receive is the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” This, as we mentioned above, is the only offensive piece of armor that we have.

## The Divine Defender

In that sense, it is different from all the rest. This piece is so important, especially in the context of apologetics and persuasion, that we will need to give it a particular focus in the next chapter.

### THE LORD'S BATTLE

As soon as Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, the Lord determined to subdue and conquer it (Gen 3:15). He could have destroyed it and all its effects immediately. There is nothing about the presence of sin that *requires* the Lord to battle it throughout history. But He determined that history would be defined, in part, by this ongoing battle. The outcome of the battle has never been in doubt. In this particular battle, the two sides are not equal. As with all things in creation, the Lord sovereignly controls all that comes to pass.

The reason the battle rages is so that the Lord Himself would be glorified in and through the battle (Rom 11:36). He continues to fight the battle so that we, His creatures, might continually see His character and His glory against the backdrop of the ugly and destructive nature of sin (Rom 8:18–19).

It is the Lord who is the Great Apologist. He defends His character against the tenacious and insidious attacks of those who would oppose Him, both here on earth and in the heavenlies. He is, throughout redemptive history, the Divine Warrior.

In this battle, He chooses weak, frail, finite, and sinful creatures like us to be involved. The armor that He Himself wears in the battle is now the armor that we are to wear as we seek, persuasively, to defend the Christian faith.

Every battle requires preparation, and preparation must be thoughtful and intentional. To rush foolishly into battle is to ensure defeat. The Lord gives us specific instructions in His Word about how we can best prepare for the battle to which He has called us.

As we have seen, the preparation required is that we don the proper

## The Faithful Apologist

armor. And the proper armor, as we have also recognized, is the very armor that the Lord Himself has worn for battle.

We see in redemptive history that the Lord fights the battle against His enemies, and He fights that battle using us as His soldiers. As we engage in that battle—which is what apologetics is—responding to objections, challenging others in their unbelief, our focus must always be on the One who is “commander of the army of the LORD” (Josh 5:14). We are given the privilege of fighting with our captain. We battle against heavenly powers. In all of this, however, the captain has assured us of the final outcome.

It is not up to us, therefore, to *win* the battle; the Lord Himself has already done that. It is up to us to prepare ourselves for the battle, and to engage it, so that it will become obvious, more and more, whose battle it is and what the final outcome will be.

As we put on and receive the full armor of God, we ready ourselves for the war that continues until Christ returns and finally subdues all of His enemies, even death (1 Cor 15:26).

It is instructive to notice how Paul concludes his exhortation that we properly prepare for battle: “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people” (Eph 6:18). Surely Paul concludes his message this way in order to remind us of two key aspects to this battle: First, it is a spiritual battle, and spiritual battles require spiritual weapons. Second, the weapons themselves are not sufficient. As we prepare, we are to “pray in the Spirit” and to “be alert.”

The command to pray sets our focus in the proper direction. It causes us to fix our gaze, not on the horizontal activity that is right in front of our eyes, but on the vertical relationship we have with the One who is fighting as our Captain. Without such a focus, we could be tempted to misconstrue the battle and its final goal.

As we pray, we are also exhorted to be alert. The idea here is that we are always to be on guard. Since we have put on the full armor of God, it is our responsibility to be alert to the challenges and objections that come



## The Divine Defender

at us from various sides. It would do us no good to be fully armored, but asleep. Because we are fully armored, we look to our captain in prayer, and we keep our eyes open so that the Lord's enemies will gain no foothold in the battle.

It should be a great comfort for us to know that the battle to which the Lord calls us is *His* battle in the first place. And because it is His battle, He is the One, in the end, who fights it. He fights the battle with His own armor, as we have seen. But as He calls us to the privilege of fighting with Him, He gives us the very armor that He Himself wears. He does that because it is His armor alone that is adequate for the fight. We cannot arm ourselves with anything that would be sufficient for the battle. As we arm ourselves with His armor, we acknowledge that the battle belongs to the Lord.

A number of years ago, I was invited to a local university to debate the problem of evil with one of their philosophy professors. It was actually more of a discussion than a debate, as I presented my own view and then he presented his, with a question-and-answer time after our presentations.

There are various ways to discuss the problem of evil, but I decided it was best for the audience to recognize, in the end, that whatever questions might remain about that problem, the Lord Himself had come down to *suffer* and to *die* in order to destroy the evil that seeks to oppose Him. In other words, the Lord "connected" Himself to that very problem by immersing Himself in it, as well as its effects (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 2:14–18). As I thought about what I should say at that university, I was conscious of the fact that I was going into battle and that I needed all of the battle resources the Lord gives in order to engage it.

At the end of the question-and-answer time, one student stood up, and with some emotion, pointed his finger at me and the philosophy professor and said something like, "I want each of you to tell me this: Why should I believe anything you have said tonight?" This question was a challenge to both speakers. It was a challenge of persuasion and of our authority. What about each of us, he was asking, would move him to believe what we had said. How might you answer a question like that?

## The Faithful Apologist

If you were defending and commending the gospel, what would your response be to that question?

Because I had heard questions similar to this from my own students, I recognized the important point behind the question. What the student was, in fact, asking for was a connection between himself and what we had said. His question went to the heart of the “debate.”

The philosophy professor motioned to me to go to the microphone first. I went up to the mic and decided that since the student had challenged me, I would challenge him in turn. So, since lecture and questions were over, I said something like this: “You have asked a good question. Why *should* you believe me? Let me respond with my own challenge. The answer to your question is, you shouldn’t believe me. But here is what I would challenge you to do. When you leave here, go back to your dorm room, find a Bible somewhere, and open it to the Gospel of John. Read that Gospel from the first to the last. And here is what you need to understand: If you accept my challenge and you read the Gospel of John, you are duty-bound, under God, to believe what it says.”

Can you see the point? Can you see how I tried to connect his challenge to my own presentation? He was rightly concerned with the authority of the speakers. He wanted to know if there was something in us that would place an onus on him to believe one of us. I could have talked to him about my own teaching experience, publications, and academic research (which is what the philosophy professor did after me). But none of that would have been sufficient for the Lord’s battle. The Lord’s battle requires the Lord’s own authority, so I connected his concern to my commitment to the persuasive authority of Scripture. If the battle that day was simply mine to fight, I would not have answered as I did. Since it is the Lord’s battle, it was my delight to refer this student to what Christ Himself says. In that way, the Lord’s own armor, which was mine in the battle, helped me to see the battle for what it really was, and, by God’s grace, to place the persuasive authority for my discussion in its proper place, the Holy Spirit speaking by and with the Word of God.

## The Divine Defender

The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, is God's chosen offensive weapon for us. With it, we strike at the heart of Christ's enemies. With it, the Holy Spirit is able persuasively to penetrate to the depth of sin's destruction.

We need now to look more closely at this weapon, in order to recognize the power it possesses in the battle. It is this Word, the very speech of God, that allows for an apologetic that is persuasive, as well as for persuasion that properly defends the Christian faith.

