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**A biblical investigation of the Pauline apologetic  
framework and its implications for evangelism in  
a postmodern context**

by

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## **PREFACE**

My current job as a software executive often dictates that I spend many lonely hours travelling and endure solitary stays at numerous hotels. However, it was an overnight at a Marriott hotel and a 'chance' reading through a Gideon Bible placed in a hotel nightstand that God used to give me the insight into the apologetic methodology of the Apostle Paul. Almost every theme and paragraph contained within this dissertation came out of that early morning reading through the book of 1 Thessalonians.

My love and strong devotion to the field of Christian apologetics first began with a book by a man who would later become one of my primary professors in my Master's program: Dr. Norman Geisler. Since that initial encounter with his work, I have maintained a constant study of the apologetics field and have built a library filled with works by those who share a passion for defending the Christian faith against its detractors and providing an intelligent and thoughtful answer to those who need help with questions about God and His Messiah. Regarding the latter, I am reminded of a correspondence I had with a professing and sharp atheist who ended his first letter to me by saying, "If you can give me the faith you speak of - a reason to believe - I'll take it." Such cries for help necessitate that today's Christians always be at the ready to give an answer for the hope that is in them (1 Pet. 3:15).

Throughout the writing of this dissertation, I have received very helpful guidance from my promoters, which has ensured that this work meets their high academic standards. To be sure, my personal library has greatly expanded during the writing of this work and no one has been more surprised at the end conclusions of this research than me. It is my hope and prayer that it has made me a better apologist for Christ and will one day help others who come after me contend for the faith that has once for all been given to the saints (Jude 3).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to give praise to my God and Savior Jesus Christ for saving me and using such an imperfect person to further His Kingdom. Such a thing is a true testimony of God being able to draw a straight line with a crooked stick.

Next, I would like to thank my family - my wife Laura, and my two daughters Hannah and Claire - for giving up large amounts of time with their husband and dad, and kindly putting up with my weariness at times so I could complete this work.

I would also like to thank my sister Diane and good friend Billy Bosworth for donating their precious little free time to act as my personal chapter reviewers. Your observations and insight made a big difference in the final outcome.

Many thanks also go to Peggy Evans of Greenwich School of Theology for her assistance and guidance along the way. I also wish to express my gratitude to my promoters: Prof. Roger B. Grainger, Greenwich School of Theology, and Profs Callie Coetzee and Gert Jordaan of North-West University, Potchefstroom for their skilled insight and constructive feedback. Thank you for using your time and energy to train ready and able workers for God's harvest (Matt. 9:37-38).

## ABSTRACT

This work is an investigation to uncover the apologetic framework used by the Apostle Paul and discuss how it might be applied to current evangelistic efforts in Postmodernism. To be certain, there are a number of issues that face Christianity in the twenty-first century. I will give particular emphasis to the philosophical teachings and arguments that are characterized as being postmodernist in nature. Although within Postmodernism numerous individual challenges to Christian thought are present, I have selected four core issues to examine: (1) relative truth; (2) relative language and meaning; (3) philosophical pluralism; (4) a perceived lack of authenticity in the lives of professing Christians. The first three have been chosen because I believe there to be a meaningful downward progression from the first to the third, which culminates in what I believe is a relegation of the Christian Gospel to the realm of opinion and not truth. The fourth challenge has been selected because of recent research that argues it has perhaps become the single biggest obstacle for postmodernists in considering Christianity as a valid belief system.

Once each of these evangelistic challenges is explored in detail and traced from its point of origin, attention is then given to uncovering the apologetic framework used by the Apostle Paul in the first century. This process is basically two-step in nature. Step one involves gaining an understanding of the Apostle Paul's world and discovering the factors that molded him into God's first century apologist. This involves examining Paul's culture, the competing religions and philosophies of the first century, the background and education of the Apostle, and his conversion and commissioning by God while on the road to Damascus. The resulting information allows us to build a bridge between the first century world of the Apostle Paul and today's postmodernist age.

The second step in uncovering Paul's apologetic framework is to examine the biblical texts that describe the Apostle's evangelistic efforts and thoughts regarding the delivery of an *apologia* for the Christian faith. This equates to an

investigation of the book of Acts and the Pauline corpus. The conclusions of this inquiry result in a new apologetic classification – that of *tria martus* or “three witness” apologetics – with the cornerstone verse of the framework being 1 Thess. 1:5, which says: “for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.” Labeling each component of Paul’s apologetic framework results in an analysis being performed of the *message* of Paul, the *method* of Paul, and the *manner* of Paul. After this has been done, one last question with respect to Paul’s framework needs to be answered: Is the Apostle’s *apologia* prescriptive or descriptive? While the book of Acts describes Paul’s evangelistic and apologetic method in action, does Paul prescribe his method in his writings? Answering this question is pivotal in deciding whether to take Paul’s framework and apply it to today’s postmodernist culture.

I believe the evidence points to Paul’s framework being prescriptive, so the task then becomes how to apply the Apostle’s *apologia* to Postmodernism, and how it addresses the challenges to Christianity that were identified earlier. As Paul’s apologetic framework consists of three components, it becomes sensible for modern day apologists to take each part of the Apostle’s framework and apply it to the various dimensions of the postmodernist unbeliever. This application results in an evangelist speaking to the rational, spiritual, and moral dimensions of non-Christians, with each challenge of Postmodernism being appealed to amongst the various dimensions.

When applied, I believe three-witness apologetics represents a strong framework for giving honest and robust answers to the postmodernist unbeliever. While the postmodernist culture certainly poses some threats to Christianity, I firmly believe that the Apostle Paul would have thrived in today’s climate and eagerly sought out converts from Postmodernism. I also believe that those who choose to use his apologetic framework will enjoy a harvest that enlarges the body of Christ and brings glory to the Creator of all humankind.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since its inception, Christianity has been required to address many challenges evoked by the cultural and philosophical context in which it has found itself. The situation today is no different. For someone faced with the demands of a largely pluralistic secular society, the search for any religious ideal is generally regarded as a matter of personal choice, the primary concern being one of the individual's right to express their uniqueness. Thus, relativism and scepticism towards any universal religious theme are promoted in the name of Postmodernism: a state of "incredulity toward meta-narratives" (Lyotard, 1979: xxiv) and a loss in the objectivity of language. Moreover, even the very concept of absolute truth is contested, with some arguing that the postmodernist culture has moved beyond a concern for 'truth' in the sense that it has traditionally been understood (Groothuis, 2000: 22).

This is not to say that Postmodernism has proven to be an enemy of the Church in total. Certainly, Modernism showed itself to be an enemy of Christianity in its denial of revelation and focus on philosophical naturalism. As some philosophers have observed, Modernism (1) proved to be economically bankrupt to satisfy humanity, resulting in a loss of essential value; (2) technologically impotent to save humanity, resulting in a loss of hope, and; (3) philosophically inept to explain humanity, resulting in a loss of meaning (cf. Ramsden). The resulting reaction against Modernism was Postmodernism, which through its scepticism has in essence 'levelled the playing field' and put each and every belief on equal footing. Such a situation benefits Christian missionaries because their audience is oftentimes open to discussing the beliefs of a faith that they may not personally hold.

But while Postmodernism provides some benefits to Christian evangelists, it also presents some very real challenges. Globally, the Church has tended to acknowledge Postmodernism as a fact of life, though the converse can scarcely be said to be true (Mohler, 2005: 58). Possibly as an attempt to be regarded by outsiders as still societally relevant, the Church has sometimes embraced

postmodernist ideals in an almost syncretistic fashion, thus attracting allegations of compromise from within its own ranks (MacArthur, 2007: ix). Consequently, Christianity is often viewed as merely one faith option amongst many of similar stature from which those with a religious proclivity may choose. That many within denominational Christendom vociferously promote their more emotive features at the expense of legitimate reason and intellect has served only to further complicate matters (Pearcey, 2004: 254). As a result – and in general terms – the Church of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century finds itself not only ill-prepared for the questions posed by genuine enquirers and hostile opponents alike, but often lacking in understanding regarding the questions themselves (Schaeffer, 1990C: 289).

Surely there is no better time than the present for the Church to reinvestigate how its forbears dealt with similar situations around two thousand years ago. Certainly, the words, works and writings of Paul, the apostle, as revealed to us through the pages of the New Testament, represent a worthy apologetic framework for us to consider in just such a context.

Although there are ample literary contributions by those who take an apologetic approach to countering the arguments against Christianity as a belief system (Habermas & Licona, 2004; McDowell, 1999; Geisler & Turek, 2004), there appears to be lack of interest in asking the question of what methodical framework the apostle Paul used (as seen in the New Testament) to win converts to Christianity and how it might be used to answer some of the challenges that face the Church today. Even a cursory inspection of the New Testament evidence reveals that Paul modified his rhetoric to suit his listening audience. That notwithstanding, there are certain identifiable components that might be regarded as almost constant. Some of these may well be personal in the sense that they are but expressions of Paul's natural persona; more commonly, however, it is possible to identify principles that can be readily applied. Thus, we must first of all consider and distinguish between Paul's message, his methodological approach and his manner of communication.

The Acts of the apostles and the letters that bear his name reveal Paul to be a man ready to present his case by engaging with both the intellect and the heart (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23). Would that the same could be said of the Church today. A number of authors (e.g. Moreland, 1997; Sproul, 2003) have raised concerns on what they consider to be the eviction of the intellect in the Church and have thus approached evangelism in a more cerebral fashion, with some giving particular attention to the rise of 'militant atheism' (Zacharias, 2008: 7). Others, such as some of those in the Emerging Church movement, decry a purely cerebral approach, with the argument being that it is insufficient to meet the needs precipitated by humankind (Schmelzer, 2008: 154). If the Christian faith is ultimately personal, then it must first of all be personable as well they say. Finally, a third group states that the approach to winning the lost must include logical argumentation, but also an apologetic that is felt as well (Zacharias, 2007: 331).

The central question of this work, therefore, is: "What is the apologetic framework used by the apostle Paul as revealed in the pages of the New Testament and can it help twenty-first century Christians address the issues it faces in a postmodernist context?" The questions that naturally emerge from this problem are:

- What are the primary features of the apologetic framework from which the apostle Paul addressed the cultural-philosophical challenges of his time?
- What were the cultural-philosophical challenges that the apostle Paul addressed in the first century AD and how do these compare to postmodernist challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- What are the main challenges and potential ramifications facing Christian evangelism in the postmodernist age of seeming relative truth, secularism, and pluralism?

- How can the principles determined by the above examination be applied to the challenges identified earlier?

The aim of this thesis is to make a new investigation of Paul's apologetic framework, as revealed in the pages of the New Testament, and to determine its applicability to issues twenty-first century Christianity faces in a postmodernist context. The exploration will have a dual nature, with a primary focus on apologetics that makes use of material from the New Testament as its principal source of evidence.

The objectives of this study must be seen in their relationship to the aim. In so doing, I intend to approach the subject from the following four angles:

- i) To examine the primary contributory features of the apostle Paul's apologetic framework as revealed in the book of Acts and in the Apostle's writings;
- ii) To establish the culturo-philosophical background of the apostle Paul in the first century AD and compare it to modern-day postmodernistic challenges;
- iii) To identify some challenges brought about by Postmodernism that face Christian evangelism in the twenty-first century and the potential ramifications thereof;
- iv) To apply the principles determined by the above examination to the challenges previously identified.

The central theoretical argument of this study is that the Pauline apologetic framework in the New Testament should and can be developed for use in evangelism by modern day defenders of Christianity who have to face the spiritual climate of Postmodernism.

The central argument will be primarily supported in two ways. First, information from Paul's activities in the book of Acts will be corroborated with the Apostle's letters in an attempt to confirm the apologetic framework that he used. Afterwards, a number of guiding hermeneutical principles will be examined and used to determine if a prescriptive application of Paul's method to the current era should be made. Second, a study and comparison of first century humanity with today's postmodernist culture will be performed in an effort to uncover similarities between the two to support the conclusion that what God used with and through Paul in the first century will be applicable to modern day non-Christians.

As to why the postmodernist has been chosen as the target for evangelism in this work vs. those of another philosophical persuasion, research put forth in subsequent chapters will show that the postmodernist is truly interested in spiritual matters and therefore open to hearing the message of the Christian gospel. Data will be presented that demonstrates Postmodernism has not removed a concern for spirituality from its adherents, notwithstanding the fact that the information also shows faith is not a priority for most postmodernists.

My personal background is one that finds most sympathy with the broad spectrum of the Evangelical tradition and therefore, the methods I propose to employ in this theological study include:

- A study of literary sources that reflect challenges to Christianity in the twenty-first century, with attention being given to material produced both inside and outside the Church.
- An analysis, based on a literary study, of the culture and philosophy that prevailed in the Roman Empire during the first century AD.
- A cursory exegesis using the grammatical-historical framework will be used to examine the New Testament book of Acts and the Pauline corpus: one that makes use of currently published commentaries along with a minor amount of fresh hermeneutical analysis performed by the author. Note that the main focus of the

investigation is not exegesis as such. The amount of exegesis performed in this work will be minor and only used to support the theological deductions of the thesis. Unless noted, all biblical quotes will be taken from the New American Standard 1995 update version.

- An application – where possible – of the lessons learned from the previous objective to the challenges identified in the first objective; in other words, to find common ground between the challenges Paul faced and those found in today’s postmodernist context, and ascertain what apologetic mechanisms the Apostle used (if any) may be applied to current evangelistic encounters.

## CHAPTER 2: A PROFILE OF PAUL THE APOLOGIST AND HIS TIMES

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this chapter is to gain an understanding of the Apostle Paul's world and to discover the factors that molded him into God's first century apologist whose purpose was to evangelize Jews and Gentiles alike, while defending Christianity's truth claims against competing religions and philosophies of the day (cf. Acts 17). This investigation shall be carried out by gathering and interpreting information from scholarly publications regarding cultural, socio-political and other historical research of the apostolic times. Once this analysis has been performed, it will then be possible to determine in subsequent chapters what religious and philosophic characteristics – if any – Paul's culture shares with the current postmodern age and what individual aspects of Paul's pre- and post-Christian life may serve as an instructive example to present-day apologists who wish to mirror Paul's apologetic style and technique. Although there are a number of ways to approach such an examination, four specific areas of study will form the focus of this chapter.

The first area of concentration will be the cultural setting in which Paul found himself (cf. section 2.2 below). The goal of this section is to extract information that will help in understanding the various characteristics that helped shaped the religious and spiritual mood of that time, along with the personal needs that were being expressed by the individuals who lived during the first century. Obviously, this brief analysis cannot possibly present an exhaustive portrait of Paul's culture. Therefore, the study is limited to the societal aspects that may have helped construct worldviews from which religious mindsets would form and other factors pertinent to Paul's apologetics and evangelism.

The next area of our attention is an examination of the competing religions and philosophies of Paul's day (cf. section 2.3 below), with special emphasis being given to the more popular movements that may have likely confronted a first

century Christian evangelist and apologist. The end goal of this section will be to ferret out characteristics of these faiths and philosophies that may be similar to that of postmodern thought, and see what needs they may have met in the populace who lived during that time. In addition, aspects of these movements common to Christianity will also be noted.

Third, a brief study of the background and education of Paul will be performed (cf. section 2.4 below). As will be demonstrated later, when God apprehended Paul on the road to Damascus and commissioned him to evangelize the first century world for Christ, He did not eradicate the various aspects of Paul's ancestry and educational training that contributed to the overall makeup of Paul's character, but instead used both in producing a premier apologist who was well-equipped for missionary and church planting work. It will be argued that in the same way that God preserved and utilized the various human aspects and literary styles of each biblical author to produce His Word (e.g. the background and education of Amos differed mightily from that of Luke the physician), God used Paul's upbringing and schooling to design a method of evangelism that was effective in winning converts away from the various first century philosophies and pagan religions.

Finally, a brief look into the conversion and commissioning of Paul will be explored, focusing on what effect the experience of evangelism and apologetic defense of the one true God had upon him (cf. section 2.5 below). The concluding analysis that emerges from examining these four topics will then be utilized in two upcoming chapters in the following manner: first, a discovery of Paul's apologetic framework, and second, an investigation into how Paul's framework might be applied to the challenges identified in Chapter Five of this work. The goal, therefore, is to explore the ways in which Paul's framework might overcome today's postmodern obstacles to evangelism.

In summary, the information resulting from this chapter will allow us to build a bridge between the first century world of the Apostle Paul and today's

postmodernist age. In Chapter Four, the data gleaned from this chapter will be utilized to see if any aspects of Paul's ancestry, educational training, and conversion helped him form the basis of his apologetic methodology. In Chapter Six, this analysis will be used to examine similarities and differences between the most popular religions and philosophies of Paul's day and the spiritual climate and teachings found in Postmodernism.

## **2.2 THE CULTURAL SETTING OF PAUL**

In this section, we will look at the culture that surrounded the Apostle Paul with an eye being directed towards the social and communal attributes that may have contributed to the personal spiritual development of individuals during that era and the presuppositions they may have carried into an evangelistic encounter. This will be done to see if we can later identify common elements of Paul's culture and the postmodern culture of the present day.

### **2.2.1 General Attributes of Paul's Culture**

Paul lived in a world that was very different from ours, especially different from the modern industrialized West. When one looks at Paul's culture, the first concept that comes to mind is that it was a Hellenized society. Alexander the Great, arguably the greatest student of Aristotle, took the Aristotelian way of thinking and created the Hellenistic world. The logical methodology of Aristotle pervaded the customs of first century life and created a mental framework that Paul of Tarsus would likely have to move within and understand if he was going to reach his audience for Christ. Alexander of Macedon had a goal of establishing an *oikoumene*, a common world, a close-knit self-contained entity united by the Greek language and culture (Tripolitis, 2002: 1).

The term Hellenistic is generally used to refer to the period of history from 331 B.C. when Alexander of Macedon defeated the Persian Darius. Although

politically the Hellenistic world came to an end in 31-30 B.C., the Hellenistic age continued to flourish under Roman political domination and in a very real way captive Greece captivated her conqueror. The Hellenistic period officially came to an end in the 4th century with the emergence of the Christian state. In looking at Alexander's Hellenized world, I agree with theologian Ronald Nash in his identification of four central characteristics that shaped the people of that day. What follows is an overview based on his work in this area.

First, he argues that the Greek conquests heralded a new kind of cosmopolitanism (Nash, 1992: 11). More than ever before, the peoples and nations of the Mediterranean world were united. Beyond mere political union, they were bound together by a common law, a common language (Koine Greek), and a progressively more common culture. People could trade and travel more widely, which introduced a new sense of freedom into individuals. In addition, people of different races and nations could converse in a common language making intellectual exchanges much easier. Naturally, the removal of language barriers would assist the exchange of ideas and learning among people of different backgrounds, and later help accelerate the spread of Paul's evangelistic message throughout the Roman Empire. The greatest difficulty which normally presented itself to a missionary – that of mastering the language, and thereby the psyche of the heathen – scarcely existed for Paul in his world (Deissmann, 1957: 41). As an example, in Judaea and Jerusalem which did form part of the Hellenistic world, Greek was spoken alongside Aramaic, with scriptures being read and services conducted in Greek (Bruce, 1977: 126).

Second Nash believes there was a new birthing of individualism (Nash, 1992: 11). Prior to Alexander, there was little room for individualism, evidence of which can be found in Plato's and Aristotle's political writings, which illustrate the subordination of the individual to the larger community – something that was the norm for their time. As in Postmodernism today, individualism in religion was encouraged by a general attitude of inclusivism that characterized Roman religions (with examples being provided later in this chapter). Even the

insistence on the worship of the emperor was not regarded as inconsistent with other general religious beliefs and practices. It should be remembered that one major cause of the Roman persecution of Christians was the exclusive nature of Christian belief; Christianity simply did not tolerate the worship of any other god, including the emperor (cf. Acts 17:7).

However it should be noted that some theologians such as Witherington argue that, while individualism increased during this period, people did not live to fully do their own thing and be their own persons, but instead lived for the acclaim of others in many ways. In first century society there was an ever-narrowing circle of relationships – hometown, kin, one’s own house, and in this circle, individuality was oftentimes not encouraged or seen as a good thing (Witherington, 1998: 27).

A person’s personality whose basic sense of identity comes from the group or groups of which a person is a part is called a *dyadic* personality (Witherington, 1998: 31). Such a person does not ask who he is but rather whose he is – what group they belong to. In this respect, one’s social network in many ways defines the identity of the individual. A person’s identity was contained within economic, political, ethnic, and religious realities, so much so that one’s clan or kin defined the very essence of one’s identity. Such a thing is true in many parts of the world today and was especially the case in Paul’s milieu. As an example, Paul describes himself as a Jew of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5).

One final aspect of interest about a first century person’s inner circle or group is that every social interaction that took place outside one’s family or circle of friends was perceived as an honor challenge, which was an occasion to accrue honor from one’s social equals or superiors by performing some deed or service. However, the concept of grace (as later preached by Paul), or an undeserved benefit that came without strings attached, was virtually unknown (Witherington, 1998: 19, 47).

Although the first century populace maintained a strong tie to its inner circle, the shift from nationalism to cosmopolitanism provided many with a feeling of both alienation and insecurity. As people became freer to travel and experienced both greater mobility and individualism, old traditions and values were consistently being uprooted, with static class structures beginning to disappear, past certitudes being questioned, and the future becoming somewhat uncertain. This became more pronounced by the 2nd century when the Hellenistic-Roman world had witnessed a succession of barbarian invasions, bloody civil wars, various recurring plagues, famines, and economic crises (Tripolitis, 2002: 2).

This insecurity brought a need for religious faith. The key characteristic of religious movements, and the third general trait of the Hellenistic world that Nash and other scholars (e.g. Gresham Machen, 2006) assert was present in the first century, was syncretism with the Hellenistic age being described as the age of syncretism par excellence. The Hellenistic world contained an almost endless variety of combinations and mixtures of religions and philosophy. Gradually during the Hellenistic age, most of the walls between the major philosophies and systems began to evaporate, with this being especially true in the case of Platonism and Stoicism from about 100 B.C. to A.D. 100. There was little to prevent an especially religious person from worshiping any number of gods that belonged to an equally large number of religions. As noted earlier, evidence furnished by the New Testament suggests that early Christianity was an exception to the syncretism and inclusiveness of the Hellenistic age, which may have contributed to its persecution (Nash, 1992: 11-12).

The fourth assertion from Nash regarding key characteristics of Paul's culture (and naturally flowing from the last observation), was that the Hellenistic world spawned a revived interest in religion – a Hellenistic quest for salvation. The Christian message did not come to an irreligious and spiritually unconcerned world; in fact, individuals acknowledged spirituality much in the same way as

respondents did to the modern day surveys that will be cited in Chapter Five. In this climate, Paul's preaching of Christ would appear precisely at the time when all the striving and hopes of all peoples were converging to a focus, when the vast majority of humanity were hungering for religious support, when East and West had been wedded by Alexander's work, and when the philosophies of Greece and the religious consciousness of the Hebrew were looking for a new revelation. The Apostle Paul stepped on the religious stage at the one time in history when all civilized nations lived, as it were, under one roof, when all were able to communicate in one language, when people were unanimous as to the perils and needs of the world, and when there was general peace on earth (Nash, 1992: 13).

In summary, a move toward cosmopolitanism, a growing individualism, a practice of syncretism, and a revived interest in religion were four key characteristics of the Hellenized culture (according to Nash and Tripolitis) that would affect Paul's evangelistic and apologetic mission. But there are other attributes of the era that are worth noting as well. One fact of cultures and subcultures in the first century was that they were highly patriarchal and all or almost all the literature written about these matters is from a male-centered point of view. A person was often identified by the patronymic identifier such as "sons of Zebedee", and if the parents were good people, then it was considered deviant to be unlike them, which differs from today where it is considered fine to break from one's family ties (Witherington, 1998: 24).

Another characteristic of interest is that the concept of honor in Paul's day was closely linked to wealth and power as well as to authority. Paul lived in a culture that valued honor over life, and boasting rather than humility was seen as proper. Humility in the Greco-Roman world was not viewed as a virtue or an honorable thing, especially in a male. Indeed, the very term translated 'to humble' in the New Testament (ταπεινῶω) would normally mean to have the mind of a slave or to act in a slave-like fashion (Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, 2000). Most ancients believed that gender, geography, and generation

predetermined where one was in the hierarchy of society and what codes of honor/shame should apply. Paul would later draw ire from opponents by inverting these things to boast of shameful things (such as the cross) and considering someone else's honor (Christ's) more important than his own life (cf. Gal. 6:14, Phil. 3:7-8). This deviance from the norm in a highly conformist society could help explain why Paul was such an outcast and invariably produced strong reactions from others (Witherington, 1998: 45-46).

With a brief review of some of the more general cultural characteristics that may have had impact on Paul's evangelistic mission now concluded, the next area to examine is the religious climate of first century life. Once this has been accomplished, I will then explore in more detail the various religions and philosophies that may have competed with Paul's preaching of Christianity.

### **2.2.2 General Religious Characteristics of the Culture**

In this section, matters such as the extent to which political constraints were placed on the practice and expression of faith is studied as well as the general perception of religion during this era.

#### *2.2.2.1 Political Constraints on Religion*

The Hellenistic-Roman era was a religious age, with a tendency toward monotheism and a common longing for salvation. The changing view of the individual, together with the new Hellenistic cosmopolitanism identified above, lessened the general populace' interest and confidence in their traditional gods and various cults who were bound to a particular place and its political bent. Ordinary men and women began to search for a replacement for the hope or faith previously directed toward their ancient gods whom they now believed could not alleviate their daily encounters with the vicissitudes of Hellenistic life. Although the ruler/emperor at that time was considered a *soter*, a savior, the one who secured and preserved peace and prosperity for his subjects, the

emperor cult primarily had political implications and some historians argue that it did not fulfill the spiritual needs of the individual first century man and woman (Tripolitis, 2002, 16).

But other historians such as Du Toit, Ferguson, and Witherington believe that Roman imperial eschatology was an increasingly popular notion that Paul may have had to concern himself with; that the emperor was a god, and that since the time of Augustus, Paul's evangelistic prospects may have been taught that a new age had begun. The new age had a figure, the emperor, who was son of the gods – who indeed was supposed to be a god himself – and whose epiphany in various cities throughout the Empire was thought to bring peace, prosperity, and other blessings (Du Toit, 1998). In some cases such as Augustus, there was no way to explain power so prodigious without an appeal to the divine (Ferguson, 2003: 207). Such a belief, these historians say, would indeed be encountered by Paul during his missionary journeys and they cite the example of a thriving emperor cult that already existed in Corinth during Paul's day (Witherington, 1998: 149).

The Romans were not warm to other proclamations of kingship. During Jesus' childhood, Judas the Galilean had propounded a new teaching, that Israel was committing treason against God by paying tribute to a Gentile ruler. He led a rebellion that was brutally crushed by the Roman army of occupation (Bruce, 1977B, 7). Emperors such as Gaius took their divinity very seriously and were not open to taking threats to their self-proclaimed status. This is why Bruce argues that the charge brought against Paul in Acts 17 is actually more serious than it appears on the surface. Paul's adversaries in Thessalonica were basically stating that he was proclaiming to the people a rival Emperor, Jesus (it should also be kept in mind that the proclamation of different deities was the same offense that led to the execution of Socrates) (Bruce, 1977: 225).

### 2.2.2.2 General Perception of Religion

Regardless of historians' disagreements about the impact of Emperor worship, people of the first century were searching for a spiritual savior, one who would offer them strength and support to cope with the changing world in which they lived and immortality and happiness after their life in this world ended. One provider of this support was found in the cults and their deities that had increasingly penetrated the Greek world during this time and had become Hellenized and transformed from national to universal savior divinities. These transformed cults were known as 'mysteries' (*mysteria*: a term that can mean "initiation") through which individuals were granted admission into fellowship with the divine. These cults enjoyed great appeal, especially during the imperial period (Tripolitis, 2002: 16).

There were many competing cults and mystery religions which held out this promise of salvation from the power of evil or from a sense of estrangement in an unfriendly world (Bruce, 1977: 131). Throughout Paul's whole world, the Apostle would be sure to encounter current stories many centuries old that mimicked the Hebrew Scriptures and his message of Christianity - visible manifestations of divinity, the deception and wickedness of demons, divine powers that became human in some way, which were sent to overcome the power of darkness, and more (Deissmann, 1957: 42).

Even so, the Greeks had begun to lose confidence in their previous gods as early as the fifth century. It began with the skepticism of the Sophists and the existence of the Olympian gods along with most of the accepted beliefs about them. Plato appeared in the fourth century and did not fully reject the existence of the gods (perhaps for political reasons), but instead he sculpted them to be more philosophical abstractions rather than anthropomorphic beings (Tripolitis, 2002: 14). As religions migrated and became more cosmopolitan, many took on a new form as they adapted to their new environment. As the oriental religions became Hellenized, their myths and legends were translated into Greek and

widely communicated. A number of these religions were originally agricultural cults attached to a specific geographical area and people, with the rites being a worship of the seasonal drama of the land. But then as they migrated, they no longer considered themselves part of a certain city or town but as a member of the inhabited or known world, i.e. a global faith. As such, they were no longer concerned with the fortunes and destiny of a specific land and its deity; the religion's adherents became much more interested in a personal god, one with whom they could have a more intimate relationship (Tripolitis, 2002: 13-14).

Because of Plato's teaching, both the material and spiritual world – the whole universe itself – was believed to be the creation of a demiurge, or creator god. Humankind was believed to be an alien nomad in the material world, where materiality was negatively viewed. A person's true being, the soul, was seen as being immortal and belonging to the spiritual transcendent world. Therefore, a person's aim in life should be to purify themselves from the material things of the world and return to fellowship with the divine by cultivating their reason and living a virtuous life in obedience to their divine reason. The rewards and punishments of the soul in the next world depended on the degree to which an individual lived in accordance with his reason in this life. The doctrine of rewards and punishments in the next life are stressed in Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Phaedo* (Tripolitis, 2002: 15). Plato's influence helped fuel the Gnostic movement, but while some scholars see Paul battling Gnosticism in many of his letters (cf. Schmithals, 1972) others see only beginnings of what would grow into Gnostic struggles in epistles such as Colossians (cf. Geisler, 1995), which seems to be the more general consensus among conservative theologians.

MacGregor and Purdy highlight both negative and positive aspects of this Hellenistic quest for salvation. On the one hand there is a distinctive negative aspect – escape from those forces which hold humanity a helpless prisoner. Whether it be from the mere weight of material existence or from the fear of chance's whim or fate's inexorable decree with its denial of free will (an influence from Stoic philosophy), there existed an ancient pessimism

(MacGregor and Purdy, 1937: 236). To put the same thought another way, first century individuals sought freedom from the wheel of cosmic necessity to which people imagined themselves to be bound, controlled by starry influences and subject to the demonic, which would come to loom so large in Paul's polemic in the book of Ephesians (cf. Eph. 6). As for the positive side to the Hellenistic search for salvation, it was the crowning achievement of an individual in their quest for eternal life, wherein the soul, akin by nature to the divine, laid hold of its true birthright. And it is here that we touch the core of Hellenistic theology: the way to such salvation is through the knowledge of God (MacGregor and Purdy, 1937: 236). This is why, perhaps, Paul wrote that the Greeks search for wisdom (1 Cor. 1:22). Because of this widespread interest in salvation, there may have never been a more opportune time in prior history to launch the proclamation of the Christian gospel.

In addition to this Hellenized form of salvation seeking, there also existed the influence of Judaism and its quest for eternity. With respect to the prevalence of Judaism, the Jews in the first century had been under foreign rule since the time of Cyrus from the Persian Empire (559 B.C.), and it is important to note that (like Rome) instead of compelling them to worship the gods of the master-race, Cyrus encouraged them to practice their ancestral religion and even on occasion extended his financial aid to that end (Bruce, 1977: 26). But such freedom did not always equate to people being able to do exactly as they wished from a spiritual standpoint – various cultural obligations were oftentimes overtly enforced or subtly expected. For example, from a cultural standpoint, when the head of a household converted to a new religion, the members of the house were expected to follow (Witherington, 1998: 167). Therefore, one might expect Paul to focus his preaching toward the patriarch of the family, but we find evidence to the contrary with Acts providing examples of women alone coming to the faith and assisting Paul on his mission (e.g. Acts 16:14).

The ability of the Jews to practice their religion was certainly viewed positively and contributed to their maintaining religious and doctrinal exclusivity, but it did have negative aspects where the general population was concerned. This ease of religious expressions contributed to the chief priests and Sanhedrin of that time growing wealthy to the point of having insufficient appreciation of the economic situation of others. They knew that their continued enjoyment of things depended on the maintenance of the existing order (Bruce, 1977: 28). Such an attitude toward the common person stood in direct contrast to the preaching of community, the equality of all, and the sharing of material goods that early Christianity would introduce (e.g. Acts 2:44-45).

Deissmann argues that the Christian teachings would enter a world decadent, morally corrupt, and religiously bankrupt in some aspects. Even so, a strong religious emotion and marked aptitude for religion are to be seen in these people, and in that sense, Paul's world cannot be viewed as religiously impoverished. Also, the religious syncretism and the migrating of gods from east to west and west to east have long been recognized as proofs of a strong religious feeling during this time. As an example, in Paul's speech on Mars Hill, witness is born to the fact that the Athenians were very religious (Deissmann, 1957: 46).

### **2.2.3 Summary**

The culture of Paul's first century world exhibited a number of important characteristics that would likely have helped shape the methodology and framework that Paul would eventually use for his evangelistic and apologetic endeavors. One would expect that the growing cosmopolitanism, sense of individual freedom, and revived interest in religious and spiritual matters would have been positive contributors to Paul's mission, whereas the practice of syncretism may have presented a challenge to the exclusive message that Paul would be preaching.

The mood of seeking salvation was also a cultural trait that Paul should have benefited from as well, although there would certainly be competitors for the populace' loyalty that the Apostle may have to wrestle with, such as the Roman Emperor cults, various pagan deities from the mystery religions of that time, and general philosophic approaches to spiritual enlightenment. Let us now perform a more detailed examination of those competing faiths and philosophies that Paul may have encountered and document characteristics of the dominant players that will be used in upcoming chapters for a comparison with postmodern faiths and philosophies.

## **2.3 THE COMPETING RELIGIONS AND PHILOSOPHIES OF PAUL'S DAY**

This section is primarily focused on the most influential philosophies and religious faith movements of the first century that Paul may have encountered during his evangelistic missions and those that may have likely affected his apologetic framework design. First of all, the most significant religious groups that existed at that time are described, followed by a survey of the key philosophical movements of Paul's day.

### **2.3.1 Primary Religious Movements**

The two primary religious movements of Paul's day were the mystery cults and Judaism.

#### *2.3.1.1 The Mystery Cults*

When speaking of cults, it is important to first note that cults are either 'acting' cults or 'reacting' cults, but in both cases some sort of action takes place. In the first type the action is a spontaneous performance of the individual or of the community intended to produce a response to its performance from the deity effective through its own execution. In the second – the reacting type – the

action of the person is an action in response to the deity, a reaction. Here it is the god himself who is really the *Leitourgos*, the *Theurgos* in the highest sense; the individual or the community only says the amen (Deissmann, 1957: 118).

Three essential characteristics were common to all the mystery cults: (1) a purification rite by which the initiate is granted admission and participation in the activity of the cult; (2) a sense of a personal relationship or communion with the deity or deities of the cult; (3) the hope or promise of a life of blessedness after death (Tripolitis, 2002: 17). Four of the more prominent and influential Hellenistic-Roman cults were the cult of Demeter and those of Dionysus, Isis, and Cybele or Magna Mater (Tripolitis, 2002: 17).

The cult of Demeter developed into a national institution and created within Greece a society united by a feeling of close brotherhood. It acquired world-wide significance, although her mysteries (or initiation rites) were performed only at Eleusis. By the seventh century, the mysteries had assumed a different aspect: Demeter, who began as an agricultural deity, not only had power over the fertility of the soil but also over the human soul. Her mysteries promised prosperity in this life (a difference that Paul would later preach) and a blessed immortality to those who had been initiated into the cult (Tripolitis, 2002: 19).

Demeter had a prerequisite of silence imposed upon the initiates which was very strictly enforced and maintained. The initiations included fasting, the ritual of washing and purification by water, and public sacrifice. These served as a preliminary exercise to determine the acceptability of the participants and to prepare them for initiation into the Greater Mysteries, the second and highest stage of the mysteries. The final ritual of the ceremony included three elements: the *dromena*, the things demonstrated; the *logomena*, the words spoken; and the *deiknoumena*, the objects that were shown. Cicero succinctly described the Demeter mysteries when he said that Athens has given nothing more excellent or divine to the world than the Eleusinian mysteries: "we recognize in them the true principles of life" and have learned from them "how to live in happiness

and how to die with a better hope” (Tripolitis, 2002: 17-21). Not everyone who sought initiation in Demeter was accepted – only people of approved moral character were brought in, which is different from Paul’s proclamation of a Gospel that accepted everyone as they were, but then required repentance of unapproved behavior.

Dionysus was known by the Romans as Bacchus. A lack of a central organization resulted in many varying accounts of the god, his birth, and his adventures, most of which are inconsistent with one another. The god was incorporated into the Greek tradition as early as the late 2nd millennium B.C. He was regarded as the god of the vine and associated with the festivals of viticulture, the cultivation of grapes held in the early spring and fall. Initially only women participated in the celebrations. It was not until the Hellenistic-Roman age that his cult gained wide acceptance and was publicly promoted by kings and emperors. Next to the god of healing, Asclepius, Dionysus was the most venerated (Ferguson, 2003: 259-261).

The kings of the Attalid kingdom of Pergamum in Asia Minor claimed Dionysus as their ancestor and he was worshipped as the official god of that realm. Italy also witnessed Dionysiac popularity – archaeological findings show it was present in Italy as early as the 6th century B.C. and by the end of the 3rd or early 2nd century A.D., the cult had taken on the fervor of a religious missionary movement. Ecstatic fanaticism and the practice of disgraceful behavior were added to win more converts – something that would certainly differ from Paul’s Christianity. Participation in these rites of Dionysus provided one with a special knowledge that led to a blessed and divine state. The cult’s numbers grew so large at one point that they were considered almost a second state, and in 186, the Roman senate considered them a seditious group and a genuine threat to the public security and therefore passed legislation to suppress the cult (Tripolitis, 2002: 24-25).

Isis was known as mistress of the heavens, the earth, the sea, and even the underworld. Coming from Egypt, the Isis cult originally represented Rome's chief rival and was suppressed, but starting with Domitian, it enjoyed uninterrupted imperial favor (Ferguson, 2003: 269-270). More powerful than Fate, Isis was ruler of the universe, all-powerful and all-seeing. Isis established laws that could never be broken and was the lawgiver and the champion of justice, which mirrors the God that Paul would preach to his Gentile audience. Women in particular sought her protection because it was Isis who established the family. She brought men and women together, caused women to be loved by men, established the marriage contract, ordained that women should bear children, and established the parent-child relationship. Isis was the patroness and glory of women and it was she who gave them equal power with men, much in the same way as Gaia in modern-day Wicca is supposed to do. She bestowed virtues like grace, beauty, fortune, truth, wisdom, and love (again, much like Gaia). Isis promised to her initiates the fulfillment of their deepest needs, both in this world and in the next (Tripolitis, 2002: 28).

Belief in Isis as the only one true and living god whose divinity encompassed all other divinities reveals a strong tendency during that time towards universality and monotheism. The cult also influenced the feminization of the godhead, a concept that was very prevalent during the Hellenistic period. By the middle of the 2nd century A.D., the cult of Isis had become universal and had spread throughout the Hellenistic-Roman world. According to Apuleius, initiation into the Isaic cult at that time was restricted to individuals who were selected by Isis herself and who were able to afford the high expenses involved in the initiation. These individuals were notified of the honor by Isis in a dream (Tripolitis, 2002: 29).

Cybele, during her prehistoric existence, was revered as Earth Mother, with the Phrygians regarding Cybele as their national goddess. This cult was known for its wild and barbaric features that included loud ululations and wild dances that incited people to bloody self-flagellation and self-mutilation. Cybele was

adopted by the Greeks who had migrated to Asia Minor early in the 12th century and she was known as *Mētēr Theōn*, Mother of the Gods (Ferguson, 2003: 281). She was initially regarded as the Mother of the earth and of fertility and came to be regarded as the inventor of agriculture and of legal order. She supposedly rejoiced during the sound of wild and rousing music so this led to ecstatic frenzy in the celebrants and in receptive devotees, which mirrored a state of divine possession. Cybele had a sanctuary in the Athenian agora (Tripolitis, 2002: 31).

It should be noted that the flute and the sound of the tympanum that led to the cult's self-mutilation was abhorrent to the Romans, but during the reign of Claudius (41-54 A.D.) things changed and new vigor came into the cult, with its popularity spreading throughout the Western world in Asia Minor by the end of the 1st century (Ferguson, 2003: 282). It was at this time that the pagan god Attis came into the Cybele cult.

The next cult of interest is the Mithras movement, which was a mystery religion in the full sense, and a faith that Meeks and Fitzgerald argue was a better bet than Christianity to become the official religion of the first century Roman empire (Meeks and Fitzgerald, 2007: xiii). Mithra was an Indo-Iranian deity whose earliest recorded evidence is found in a 14th century B.C. treaty between the Hittites and their neighbors, the Mitanni of Upper Mesopotamia. With the expansion of the Persian Empire in the 5th century, the worship of Mithra spread throughout Asia Minor, primarily in Cilicia, sometime in the last two centuries B.C. Mithra was then Hellenized and was given the name Mithras, which was a Greek form of Mithra. The movement spread rapidly throughout the empire in the last of the first century A.D (Nash, 1992: 133).

Knowledge of Mithraism is derived almost exclusively from nonliterary sources, primarily from the iconography found in the *mithraea* – the Mithras sanctuaries. One scene common in all the *mithraea* is the tauroctony, or the bull-slaying scene – regarded as Mithras' greatest accomplishment. It was thought

that the slaying of the bull accomplished some form of soteriological significance. It was an act of salvation (*soteria*) and something that was an important aspect in all the ancient mystery religions and cults (Tripolitis, 2002: 48-49). This is implied in an inscription found in the mithraeum of Santa Prisca, Rome dated 202 A.D. which says: "Us too, you have saved by shedding blood which grants eternity" (Tripolitis, 2002: 50). Two other scenes observed in these sanctuaries are the sacred meal and the rock birth of Mithras. The meal took place in a cave on the bull's skin; Mithras reclines or sits with the sun, depicted as a deity, eating the flesh of the bull and drinking its blood (Ferguson, 2003: 292). Later representations – after Christianity was flourishing – show bread and wine replacing the bull's meat and blood. Following the meal, Mithras and the sun god ascend to the heavens in the Sun's chariot. One distinction from Mithras and the gods of the cults popular during the Hellenistic-Roman period who annually were born and died is that Mithras was born once, accomplished his work laboring for goodness, and then returned to the heavens from where he supposedly guided and protected his followers (Tripolitis, 2002: 50).

Other aspects of the Mithras cult worth noting are the exclusion of women and the swearing of initiates to never reveal anything about the rite to outsiders. Severe trials and heavy tests of endurance were required, with initiates advancing through various grades and receiving titles as they went – each grade included the attainment of supposed additional insight (Tripolitis, 2002: 52). More than in any other cult, the Mithraic initiate was a member of a closely knit family that aided and assisted each other, with each member being supposedly protected by his god both in this life and the next. The Mithraic rituals included daily religious services, the burning of perpetual fire at the altars, and prayers addressed to the Sun three times a day. Sunday, the day of the Sun, was especially sacred, as was the 25th of December, the birthday of the god Mithras. There were communal meals commemorating the farewell banquet of Mithras and the Sun (Nash, 1992: 136).

Mithraism's emphasis on justice, truthfulness, loyalty, and courage made it especially appealing to the Roman legions, with the cult being especially widespread and popular in Rome. The cult's ability to adapt itself to the various regional gods and its willingness to accept other gods enhanced its appeal; it was, in modern day terms, very pluralistic and politically correct. The cult was the most syncretistic of all the cults and religions, and may have suffered from its non-exclusive mindset (Ferguson, 2003: 296). Mithraism accepted individuals who worshipped other gods in addition to Mithras (Tripolitis, 2002: 56). It did not have an established clerical hierarchy of professional clergy, nor a developed organizational structure, and no common rules existed among the various participant cities. But by the end of the 4th century A.D., Mithraism had lost all its power and influence when Constantine in 312 A.D. declared Christianity the religion of the empire (Tripolitis, 2002: 57-59).

To summarize, the mystery cults enjoyed great success during the Hellenistic-Roman period partly due to the fact that they were international and universal. With the exception of Mithraism, membership was open to all regardless of sex, nationality, or race, at a time of uncertainty and social fluidity. This feature was especially appealing. Mystery cults provided a personal, closer relationship to the divine, protection from the adversities of this life, and the promise of some sort of blessed world after death.

### *2.3.1.2 Hellenistic Judaism*

Turning our attention now to Hellenistic Judaism, we begin our very brief discussion by noting that the Jewish Diaspora began with the Babylonian exile in the 6th century B.C. Cyrus and the Persians conquered the Babylonians in 539 and encouraged the Diaspora Jews to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild their temple. In 331, Alexander the Great defeated the Babylonians and it was then that the Jews experienced the infusion of Greek culture (Ferguson, 2003: 403). The effects of Hellenization were more profound in the Diaspora than in Palestine, where the Palestinian Jews vigorously rejected all that Hellenistic

culture had to offer. The Greek language, which had become the *lingua franca* of the civilized world, never actually replaced Aramaic as the language of the people nor Hebrew as the major instrument of literature. There is no discernable trace of persecution or hostility to the Jews until the time of Roman rule beginning in the late 1st century B.C. Until that time, the Jewish communities were permitted to live according to their ancestral laws. The Hellenized Jews spoke and wrote Greek, prayed in Greek, sang Greek psalms, and produced Greek literature influenced by Greek thought (Tripolitis, 2002: 66).

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, was said to have been created by 72 Jewish scholars in 72 days and was so accurately translated that it was never to be altered (Ferguson, 2003: 432-433). With respect to its use, interpretation, and application, the philosopher Aristobulus was said to be the first to apply the allegorical method to the interpretation of the Pentateuch and the first to attempt to reconcile Greek and Hebrew thought. It should be noted that allegorical interpretation of the Septuagint was the distinctive literary product of Alexandrian Judaism, with the master of this form of interpretation in Hellenistic-Jewish philosophy being Philo Judaeus (ca. 20 B.C. – 50 A.D.) (Tripolitis, 2002: 72).

Philo's work was a combination of biblical revelation and Greek philosophy. He was the first to identify Jewish divine wisdom with the Hellenistic philosophical idea of the Logos that created the world. God, according to Philo, is pure Being, the One or Monad, an indivisible unity, with a single uncreated simple nature. Philo taught that God cannot come into contact with matter so an intermediary being was necessary – the Logos (Tripolitis, 2002: 72), a concept seen within Scripture in the books of John and Hebrews.

For some time, Judaism basked in a somewhat privileged position in the Roman world as well as being recognized and accorded a distinctive place in numerous cities of the Mediterranean world. Having rendered assistance to emperors such

as Julius Caesar, the Jews were initially granted a passing exemption from worshipping the gods of the Roman state.

Further, some Jews appeared to have influence in the Roman government, with examples including the Herods, Philo, and Tiberius Alexander. Some Jewesses also traveled in royal company and may have exerted some influence - Drusilla, who as the wife of Felix, Bernice who was the companion of Titus, and Poppaea who was the wife of Otho and then Nero (Ferguson, 2003: 429).

With respect to proselytizing, Jews did not shy away from calling attention to their religion and produced a considerable volume of propaganda-styled literature. The appeal of the Jewish faith appeared to be strong to some Gentiles who may have been wearied by the flawed Greek and Roman deities. An all-powerful monotheistic God, high ethical standards, the claim of ancient, inspired, and documented revelation, and the social cohesiveness of the Jewish community appeared to have been key attractions (Ferguson, 2003: 546).

More information concerning the Hellenistic Judaism will be covered in our forthcoming discussion of the Apostle Paul's ancestry and upbringing. Let us now turn our attention to the main philosophies of Paul's day with which he would wrestle.

### **2.3.2 Influential Philosophies of Paul's Time**

In addition to the various faith movements that were circulating during the first century, philosophy attempted to meet people's needs at this time as well.

Three schools of thought dominated the period: Stoicism, Epicureanism, and a revived Platonism, known as Middle Platonism. These philosophies offered to the educated minority what the mystery cults supplied to the average individual. They included an emphasis on the idea of a single divine First Principle and concerned themselves with the practical and ethical concerns of life, rather than the cosmological and metaphysical speculations of the Classical

age. In general, they devoted themselves to training their adherents in how to cope with and navigate the hostile world in which they lived. These philosophic teachings, which were strong between the 100 B.C. and A.D. 100 time periods, are for the most part characterized by their lack of originality, by their eclecticism, and by the transitional role they played in the overall development of philosophical systems (Nash, 1992: 19).

The primary aim of both Stoicism and Epicureanism was the attainment of individual happiness through self-sufficiency and by freeing oneself from all that is external. Both stressed ethics and morality, but were decidedly secular in nature, so Middle Platonism arose to meet the inadequacies seen in Stoicism, the Peripatetics, and Epicureanism as people's religious longings were no longer satisfied with them (Tripolitis, 2002: 37). We see both the Epicureans and Stoics in Acts 17, which chronicles Paul's famous oratory to these philosophers of Athens. Both of these groups along with the Platonists and Peripatetics were influential in Athens at the time (Witherington, 1998B: 314).

### *2.3.2.1 Stoicism*

Nash argues that, on the whole, cultured people during the first century A.D. were influenced more by Stoicism than by any other philosophical movement, with its history customarily being divided into three periods: the Early Stoa, the Middle Stoa, and the Later Stoa. The Early Stoa is dated from about 300 to 200 B.C., and includes Zeno of Citium (336-264 B.C., the founder of the school), Cleanthes (331-232 B.C.), and Chrysippus (280-204 B.C.). The Middle Stoa – approximately 150 B.C. to the beginning of the Christian era – sported such figures such as Panaetius of Rhodes (185-110 B.C.) and Posidonius (130-46 B.C.). The Later Stoa is represented by philosophers whose names are more familiar including Seneca (A.D. 1-65) who served in Nero's government; the Roman slave Epictetus (A.D. 50-138) and the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 121-180) (Nash, 1992: 57).

Stoicism was founded in Athens by Zeno (ca. 225-265 B.C.) with its name being derived from the place where Zeno taught, an open colonnade or *stoa*, in the agora or marketplace of Athens. If the apostle Paul studied any philosophy as a young man, he would probably have read philosophers like the Stoic Posidonius (130-46 B.C.)

The Stoics claimed that the universe was a single ordered whole, a perfect organism that unites within itself everything that exists in the world. The universe is ruled by a supreme cosmic power, a fiery body that the Stoics called Logos, Divine Reason, or God. As a perfect entity, the universe combines within itself the Logos or Divine Reason, which is its soul, and matter, which serves as its body. Everything is a part of God (a pantheistic framework) but not separated or cut from the whole. Each individual soul was thought to be a fragment of the universal Logos or God. A key characteristic of early Stoicism was that it did not believe in the eternality of the world, but rather in a successive, endless series of world periods, which somewhat resembles the concept of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence (Nietzsche, 1977: 93).

For the Stoics, God's relationship to the world was seen as analogous to that between the soul and body. Like the Epicureans, the Stoics were essentially materialists, for even the essence of God and of soul were seen as being made up of highly refined matter. The goal of the Stoic system was to live in accord with the rational principle that indwelt all things, and so to live according to nature. Like the Epicureans, the Stoics emphasized the preeminence of the rational over the emotions, believing in self-sufficiency or autonomy as the highest possible good (Witherington, 1998B: 514).

The principle goal of an individual in Stoicism was that of virtue. Virtue was seen as living in harmony with one's own view of nature (perhaps a forerunner of the concept of relative truth) and the nature of the cosmos, namely God. Human passions and emotions were considered by the Stoics as irrational reason and were thought to be diseases of the soul. Liberated from its

affections, the individual arrives at a state of apathy (indeed, the key word in the Stoic ethic is apathy), a state of indifference to pleasure, pain, wealth, poverty, fortune, and misfortune and therefore accepting of all that happens. The Stoics believed the world and everything in it was determined by God and thus good, so there is no concept of free will or its misuse in this framework. True happiness occurs when one accepts that which has been ordained, and thus, despite the miseries and vicissitudes in the world, an individual was expected to find inner peace and independence in the Stoic philosophy (Tripolitis, 2002: 38).

As mentioned above, an interesting element of the Stoic cosmology was determinism. The Stoics denied any possibility of free will or chance; everything that happens occurs by necessity. Human free will was thought to be an illusion. Hence, there is nothing a human being can do to alter his or her future and there is no way to alter or avoid our fate. The Stoic ethic is an elaboration of the best life available to anyone who accepts the Stoic picture of the world (Nash, 1992: 60). It can be argued that such a stance may have left its first century adherents with a feeling of encumbrance and in need of deliverance. One last area of interest concerning Stoicism is its encouragement of public service, and perhaps for this reason, the philosophy was very popular among political leaders during the Hellenistic-Roman period (Tripolitis, 2002: 39).

#### *2.3.2.2 Epicureanism*

While Nash's position on Epicureanism is that it lacked much of a following and would not have been a source of competition for any New Testament teaching (Nash, 1992: 20), other scholars (cf. Tripolitis, 2002) maintain that it was competitive, so it would be beneficial to briefly cover its core teachings and history. Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) started his school at his home in Athens. It was open to all, male and female, slave and free, people from all walks of life. The aim was the attainment of dispassionate inner peace and tranquility, which they

called *ataraxia*, invulnerability to all circumstances and changes of fortune. This state was attained by the control of the passions and the elimination of fear. The main fears, according to the Epicureans, are fear of death and the afterlife (a concern also shared by the mystery religions) and fear of the gods. To eliminate these fears they espoused an atomic worldview first taught by Democritus of Abdera and Leucippus of Miletus. According to their teaching, nothing exists except atoms composed of matter and void or space. Being material, the soul is mortal and is born and disintegrates with the body. Thus one should not fear death or an afterlife, since death is simply extinction, devoid of all feeling or consciousness. Once such a position is assumed, a person need have no fear of any supposed gods, nor worship them or give them sacrifices (Tripolitis, 2002: 40).

The aim of the Epicureans was pleasure of the mind and soul, but contrary to what some historians say, they did not solely focus on physical pleasure. They understood pleasure as the absence of bodily pain and of disquiet of the soul. The Epicurean life was one of moderate asceticism. They were quietists – they observed civic laws and customs and did not create any problems or disturbances in society. Unlike the Stoics, the Epicureans advocated the avoidance of public office and political life and were not concerned for the welfare of the general populace (Ferguson, 2003: 377-378).

### 2.3.2.3 *Middle Platonism*

To round out the discussion of key first century philosophies, we finally turn to Middle Platonism. Middle Platonism began on a modest scale in the latter part of the 1st century B.C. It contained elements of Aristotelian logic, Stoic psychology and ethics, and Pythagorean mysticism in varying degrees. Middle Platonism was a system of theology and religion rather than merely an abstract philosophical system. This gave it a wider reach than either Stoicism or Epicureanism (Nash, 1992: 44).

The religion of a Middle Platonist consisted of a detached intellectual devotion to the remote Supreme – to the vision of whom he hoped to attain in the next life. This was combined with a vigorous practice of the normal pagan piety towards the inferior gods, the star-gods and the other deities of mythology and public cult, who administered the affairs of the visible universe and with whom in this life we were most closely concerned. It postulated a hierarchy of three divine primary beings at the head of which is the Divine Mind or God – the first principle of reality. The supreme God was often called the One or the Good – a simple, changeless, transcendent being having no actual contact with the material world and inaccessible to the human mind in this life with the only possible exception being potential brief flashes of illumination. Being immutable and transcendent, the Supreme God does not create but instead derives from itself a second Mind or god, subordinate to and dependent on the first God, who then creates and governs the world. The third and last principle in the Middle Platonic hierarchy is the World Soul (Nash, 1992: 45).

Human souls, according to the Middle Platonists, are parts of the Divine that have descended into the material world and have become embodied. Thus, the aim in life is to free oneself from the world of matter and to return to the Divine. For Middle Platonists, peace and happiness are attained when the soul abandons the world of sense and achieves a relationship with the Good – alone with the alone. After much waiting and concentration, the soul arrives at the understanding of what is true reality (Tripolitis, 2002: 41-44).

### **2.2.3 Summary**

To win converts to Christianity, Paul would be forced to deal with both the religious and philosophic movements of his day. The two primary competing religious movements were the various mystery pagan cults and Hellenistic Judaism, while the primary philosophy was Stoicism. During the first century, confidence in the traditional cults and their gods that served as the basis of the political, social, and intellectual life had started to wane somewhat, but would

still present both a challenge and opportunities for the Apostle Paul. The unsettling conditions of the time led people to long and search for *soteria*, salvation, a release from the burdens of finitude, the misery and failure of human life. People everywhere kept their ears open to every new message of hope and eagerly prospected for a savior, someone who would bring salvation, i.e., deliverance or protection from the vicissitudes of this life and the perils of the afterlife. This they sought in the mystery cults, Hellenistic Judaism, and in the philosophies that had penetrated the Greek world.

With the study of Paul's primary spiritual competitors now concluded, we next turn to an analysis of the background and education of God's chosen first century messenger to the Hellenistic world. The goal of this analysis is to gain an understanding of those factors contributing to Paul's upbringing and schooling that would enable him to defend Christianity against his religious and philosophical competition.

## **2.4 THE BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION OF PAUL**

This section will investigate the upbringing, family history, and educational training of Paul, with the objective being to understand what impact each had on the methodology he employed during his evangelistic missions and apologetic defenses. We will begin by examining his place of origin and deduced social status, and then explore the pre-Christian aspects of his life, which are his Jewish ancestry, his Roman pedigree, and his general schooling/religious instruction.

### 2.4.1 General Contributing Factors of Paul's Background

The Apostle Paul was born in the first decade of the Christian era, in Tarsus, making him a citizen of “no insignificant city” (Acts 21:39) and a member of what was at the time one of the two or three great university towns of the first century. The name of Israel's first king, “Saul” (1 Sam. 9), in the Hebrew means “desired”. Meeks and Fitzgerald argue that Paul was named after the tribe's most famous ancestor (Meeks and Fitzgerald, 2007: xviii).

Acts 22:3 states that Paul was brought up in Jerusalem and some scholars (e.g. Deissmann, 1957: 90) argue that, although it is easy to assume at first glance that this means Paul came as a small child to Jerusalem, judging from the general impression of Paul shown in the Acts and his own corpus, they say it is on the whole more probable that the son of Tarsus spent his boyhood in the city of his birth. To them, Paul appears so very much as the Septuagint-Jew, and alongside the Aramaic he has such sovereign command of the Hellenistic *lingua franca* that we are led to assume a strong influence of the Septuagint and the Hellenistic world about him as a child. His family is thought to have immigrated to Tarsus from Gishala in Galilee, which raises the interesting question as to whether the nations are indebted to Galilee of the Gentiles for not only the Great Light but also for the light-bearer (Deissmann, 1957: 90).

But Witherington says we should accept the clear statement of Acts 22:3 as meaning what it says and that no overt, compelling evidence speaks to the contrary of Paul having grown up in Jerusalem and not Tarsus (Witherington, 1998: 306). Witherington and Deissmann also spar over the question of whether Paul was birthed into an upper or lower class environment. Deissmann states he is “very certain” that Paul of Tarsus was not one of the literary upper classes even though his native city was a seat of Greek higher education, but instead came from the unliterary lower classes and remained one of them throughout his life. To him, the tentmaker Paul ought certainly not to be thought of as a learned writer of books, who to refresh himself from his brain work, would sit

for an hour or two working as an amateur at the loom. He further claims that the Apostle's mention of "large letters" (Gal. 6:11) also is best explained as a reference to the clumsy, awkward writing of a workman's hand deformed by toil, which may throw light on the fact that Paul preferred to dictate his letters (Deissmann, 1957: 48-49). I agree with Meeks and Fitzgerald (Meeks and Fitzgerald, 2007: xxi) as well as Witherington who argues the exact opposite and observes that we are clearly dealing with a person of considerable education and knowledge and not just of Jewish matters. Paul possessed knowledge of Greek philosophy (particularly popular Stoicism) and he reflected a considerable grasp of Greco-Roman rhetoric, with his notes in 1 Cor. 9 and 2 Cor. 11:7 showing him to be a higher-status person deliberately stepping down the social ladder to identify with his converts and to be all things to all persons (1 Cor. 9:22) (Witherington, 1998: 70). Bruce agrees with Witherington and asserts that Paul knew the physical side of his trade, but was more than likely engaged in the wholesale manufacture of his wares because of his belonging to a well-to-do family (Bruce, 1977: 36).

Why such things matter to our study of Paul's background is this: in antiquity, it was believed that gender, generation, social status, and geography determined a person's identity, which means that it was forever fixed at their birth. Paul or anyone else who claimed to have become a different individual as a result of some external experience – such as his Damascus Road conversion – would likely have been seen as a deviant, liar or outcast, which may have naturally had an impact on the person's powers of persuasion with their audience. Furthermore, people of that age did not strive to be individuals but rather derived their sense of identity from the group of which they were a part (much like the emphasis Postmodernism places on its communities). After his conversion, it is not hard to recognize that Paul gained his primary sense of identity not from his physical family, which was a clear departure of that time, but from his Christian family and his relationship with Christ (Witherington, 1998: 18).

## 2.4.2 Paul the Jew, Pharisee, and Roman

A key to understanding Paul and the personal factors which may have naturally flowed into his apologetic methodology is his Jewish heritage and Pharisaic background. Even after his conversion to Christianity, Paul still reckons time by the dates of the major Jewish festivals (1 Cor. 16:8) and gives his honor rating as a Jew when pressed by his opponents (2 Cor. 11:22; Phil. 3:4-6). Such keeping with tradition would likely be applauded by those in today's emerging church who use tradition to attract prospects and strongly desire to retain early church traditions. Paul describes himself as a "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5), which is interesting seeing that a Jew born in Greek-speaking Tarsus would naturally be expected to be a Hellenist, but Paul insists upon his designation as a Hebrew. The Apostle was also a Benjamite, which brought forth Israel's first king (1 Sam. 9:1-2). This tribe had a special place of honor and was viewed with great esteem. Even after the kingdom was disrupted the tribe of Benjamin remained loyal to the house of David (Lightner, 1995). Paul also demonstrated that he could address a Jerusalem audience in Aramaic (Acts 22) - the Hebrew language - fair evidence that it was his mother tongue.

In regard to his Pharisaic credentials, Paul's parents appear to have been Pharisees before him (Acts 23:6). He had inherited his worship of God "from his fathers" (2 Tim. 1:3), but in comparing himself to others he said that he was more exceedingly zealous for the religious traditions of his fathers (Gal. 1:14 and Acts 22:3), which demonstrates a drive for religious excellence. This is noteworthy because many of the scribes - the professional expositors of the law and prophets - were disciples of the Pharisees, with about 6,000 being estimated to have existed at the time of Paul (Bruce, 1977: 48). One aspect of Pharisaic discipline that would understandably be used to build a foundation from which to defend a religious position by Paul was that they deplored the inroads of Hellenistic thought into Jewish life. Bruce argues that Paul had likely been sent to Jerusalem at an early age to be immunized against the infection of

the Hellenistic world – that “place of evil waters” as the sage Abtalyon called it (Bruce, 1977: 126).

However, in terms of Jewish religious conservatism, Bruce argues that the Pharisees were looked upon as dangerous innovators – modernists, in fact, with them occupying a middle position between the Essenes (who were strict predestinarians) and the Sadducees (who held that all things happen according to human free will). Such a mindset would likely be an asset in evangelistic discussions where the culture was pervaded by Stoic philosophy, which strictly denied the possibility of free will and was solely deterministic in nature. Many of the mystery religions also believed in self-determination (Bruce, 1977: 47).

There is one aspect of Paul’s Pharisaic life that is unmistakable, both in the Book of Acts and in his epistles: Paul had zealously persecuted the Church with a good conscience right up to his confrontation with the risen Christ. He firmly believed that what he was doing brought pleasure to God, with no shadow of doubt regarding that fact being evident anywhere in Scripture (Bruce, 1977: 189). It can be argued that a lesson Paul may have learned from his former life that drove him on to identify the concept of truth as a major theme in his letters is that sincerity and truth do not equate to the same thing, and moreover, that tragic consequences can emerge when false ideas and ideologies are practically lived out.

But Paul was more than just a Pharisee – he was both a Roman citizen and a Pharisee, with the former placing him in the elite category of Greco-Roman society already, and the latter potentially among the elite in Jewish society (Witherington, 1998: 94). If Paul was a Roman citizen, then his father must have been a Roman citizen before him, with speculation being made that perhaps Paul’s father or grandfather had rendered some outstanding service to the Roman cause (Bruce, 1977: 37). Deissmann, although he believes that Paul did not move in upper social circles prior to his conversion to Christianity, still admits that the very fact that Paul was born a Roman citizen shows that his

family cannot have lived in absolutely humble circumstances (Deissmann, 1957: 50).

Paul's Roman standing is another factor from his background that may have positively contributed to his evangelistic activities. As an example, his affirmative interaction with the Praetorian Guard while under house arrest (Phil. 1) was likely because they were not disposed to ignore or despise a Roman citizen (Witherington, 1998: 73). As a Roman citizen, Paul would be protected throughout the Empire by all the rights and privileges afforded by Roman law – something that saved him from possible torture and death a number of times (e.g. Acts 22:29 and Acts 25:11).

This “trinitarian” background of Paul – his Roman citizenship, his Pharisaic position, and his Jewish heritage likely all played roles in building a foundation that both Paul and God would use to form his apologetic framework and evangelistic methodology. Another contributor, of course, would be the formal education that Paul received.

### **2.4.3 The Education of Paul**

Because we are attempting to uncover aspects of Paul's life that would present themselves in some form in his evangelistic and apologetic methodology, we will restrict ourselves somewhat in this section and not delve into all possible facets of Paul's schooling. As previously stated, Luke tells us that Paul received his essential education not in Tarsus but in Jerusalem - "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today" (Acts 22:3). In all likelihood, he entered the school of Gamaliel – the leading Pharisee of his day - at some point in his teens. Gamaliel was the successor of Hillel, who had founded one of the two schools of legal interpretations in the first century, with Hillel's school being less strict in the application of the Law than the competing school of Shammai. But the Law was

evidently not the only subject matter studied at the school because Simeon, the son of Gamaliel is said to have had many students himself who studied “the wisdom of the Greeks”. It is therefore likely that his father communicated Greek history and thought to Paul and his other pupils (Bruce, 1977: 49, 126). But even if not by Gamaliel, Paul could have obtained some training in Greek philosophy and a good deal more in rhetoric in the Hellenized Jerusalem. One thing is certain: Paul’s education produced a multilingual individual who knew at least Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew, and presumably since he was a Roman citizen, some Latin.

For both pagan and Jewish boys, formal education began at about six years of age – it was done early because the Jews feared being amalgamated into the syncretistic Greco-Roman culture. There is evidence that elite Jewish children learned to read not only Torah but also some of the Greek classics such as Homer. In Paul’s world, only about two out of every ten people could read, which means that Paul was a letter writer in a largely oral and aural culture. Therefore, it is natural to see how the possession of oratorical skills would be a key component for personal advancement in Paul’s largely verbal culture. The acquisition of such oratorical abilities fell into three parts, all of which assisted Paul in becoming an effective evangelist and apologist: (1) the theory of discourse which included letter writing; (2) the study of the speeches of the great masters of rhetoric; (3) the writing of practice speeches (Witherington, 1998: 96-98).

Rhetoric, the art of persuasion, was a fundamental staple of ancient education and considered very important, with there being considerable desire and pressure for upwardly mobile young Jewish males in Jerusalem to gain rhetorical skills. By the time Paul was being educated, rhetoric had become the primary discipline of Roman higher education. There were three primary kinds of rhetoric, each tooled for a particular setting. *Judicial* or forensic rhetoric was for use in the law courts; *deliberative* rhetoric was meant to be used in the assembly; and *epideictic* rhetoric was meant to be used in funeral oratory or

public speeches lauding some event or person, or in oratory contests in the marketplace or arena (Witherington, 1998: 116).

The main avenues for the practice of rhetoric in Paul's day were the royal court and voluntary religious organizations where prospects had to be persuaded to join the particular group. The persuasion requirement on the part of the rhetor did not stop at that point because after inclusion into a religious group, there was then a need for the new converts to be convinced to believe and behave in a specific fashion. The form used in the latter case was deliberative rhetoric. The speaker would first speak to his own *ethos* or character, with the goal being to make the audience favorably disposed toward himself and his topic. Then the rhetor would focus on *logos*, the actual acts of persuasion, through both argumentation and insinuation. Finally the speech would turn to *pathos*, the emotional appeal meant to arouse the deeper passions and so move the audience to convict or exonerate, act or remain still, applaud or jeer (Witherington, 1998: 117).

This type of educational training, usually taught at the tertiary stage of ancient education (Meeks and Fitzgerald, 2007: xxi) that Paul most certainly received, was highly organized and taught that a speech should be made up of the following characteristics if it were to be successful in winning an individual or group over to the orator's position:

- *Exordium* – the beginning; as previously mentioned, this was meant to make the audience well disposed and open to what followed
- *Narratio* – explaining the nature of the disputed matter or facts of the argument
- *Propositio* – essential proposition of the speaker and perhaps the opponent were laid out
- *Probatio* – the essential arguments of the speech
- *Refutatio* – where the opponent's arguments were dismantled, disproved or at least disparaged.

- *Peroratio* – recapitulating the main points of the *probatio* and making the final emotional plea to the audience (Witherington, 1998: 117).

In addition to the above listing, Meeks and Fitzgerald argue that the *inclusio* device was also taught and used to frame a discussion (Meeks and Fitzgerald, 2007: xv). When understanding how Paul was instructed in these techniques and after reading some of the early church fathers' commentaries on Paul's letters such as John Chrysostom's (Chrysostom, *Homilies on Galatians*), one becomes aware that those who lived in a rhetorical environment and came into contact with Paul's body of work recognized his letters for what they really were – rhetorical speeches within an epistolary framework. Paul was obviously a creative person, and while he still utilized the standard skeletal structure of ancient letters, he still made the form his own by modifying and adding to standard epistolary elements. His letters were true surrogates for oral communication, for he made them exercises in rhetoric – the ancient art of persuasion – within an epistolary structure. In the first century, a letter would be considered a substitute for oral speech, and a good letter – one wishing to persuade its audience to a certain course of action – would seek to model as many of the best and most persuasive features of speech as possible. Even a perfunctory review of Galatians, Philippians, and Philemon demonstrates the features noted above, with 1 Corinthians (especially chapter 15) showcasing literally every rhetorical tool Paul possessed in his arsenal – logical syllogism, analogy, implications of a common existing practice, unacceptable things implied if one rejects resurrection, and more (Witherington, 1998: 119-120).

This repeated use of rhetoric yields more evidence to the fact that, with Paul, we are dealing with a well-educated and articulate individual – someone who, one could argue, would likely be highly effective in either an evangelistic or apologetic situation. The examples of his rhetorical prowess provide us support that he knew his target audience well and had made a thorough study of their make-up. Paul, being a man of his time, was a successful evangelist in part because he knew what would and would not work with the audiences he

addressed in the Greco-Roman world. He obviously knew enough about Mediterranean temperament to know that all the logic in the world without *pathos* would not likely appeal, much less persuade, just as Pascal once said, “the heart has reasons that reason knows not of” (Richardson, 1983: 486). Paul sought to appeal to the whole person, so that by all means, he might win some (1 Cor. 9:22). To win that “some” in a rhetorically saturated environment, Paul knew his speech needed to be winsome; and it is important to note that *paideia* – culture, and particularly eloquence – was one of the great Greco-Roman cultural values (Witherington, 1998: 121-126).

A couple of other observations give us key insight into Paul’s training and use of rhetoric with his expected audience. First, Paul’s letters and his rhetoric show how deeply he cared about his converts. He knew how to appeal to the whole person, both the mind, and emotions, both the spirit and the will, and he was not afraid to use the whole armory of rhetorical devices to make his point and persuade. As previously stated, text was largely a tool of oral culture and this is why the study of rhetoric in and of Paul’s letters is crucial. Paul wrote his words so that they might be heard as persuasive, not merely seen to be so (Witherington, 1998: 90)

Second, when Paul used methods of debating or persuading, such as arguing from current experience to scriptural proof in midrashic fashion (1 Cor. 9:7-14), or using what could be called *peshet* or event allegory to make a point (Gal. 4:21-31), a good measure of this had to have come from his education. It must be remembered that Paul saw himself as the propagator of the true faith as he understood it. This may have provided considerable impetus for Paul to become conversant and literate in Greek, including rhetoric, and to gain some knowledge of Greek literature and philosophy so that he could communicate well with Diaspora Jews coming to Jerusalem (Witherington, 1998: 97).

Third, although Paul obviously used skill in constructing speeches or letters that mimicked the style and presentation of such speeches, he did not attempt

to overwhelm his audience with literary prowess and write above them. A careful investigation of the vocabulary of Paul's epistles has proven that Paul did not write literary Greek and that no attempt was made to write according to accepted Greek standards. Yet his unliterary language is not vulgar to the degree that finds expression in many contemporary papyri; on the ground of his language rather Paul should certainly be assigned to a higher class, but yet it was clearly not his goal to outdistance the mental capacities of his audience with his vocabulary or literary techniques (Deissmann, 1957: 50).

#### **2.4.4 Summary**

Paul's composition of being a Jew, a Roman, and a Pharisee would likely all contribute to the formation and advancement of his evangelistic message and his apologetic framework after a fourth component was added – his conversion to Christianity. The one born in Tarsus, educated in Jerusalem under the instruction of Gamaliel, was not slow in exposing any of the aforementioned characteristics of his background when the opportune time presented itself. As to his passion for all three, it can easily be argued that his Jewish and Pharisaic traits were the ones he most internalized and personally cherished, with his Roman citizenship only proving to be useful to him in his travels and personal protection. Paul would be the first to point out that he was not an advocate of moderation in all things especially when it came to matters of religion, but instead he was a zealous, spiritual man, although one who practiced various aspects of his religion in error before his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus.

In regards to his education, Paul was obviously schooled in Jewish Law and tradition, with evidence also pointing to the fact that he was likely provided instruction in Greek philosophy and thinking, which would prove useful to him as he engaged the Hellenized world. Regarding other important parts of his education, it can be argued that his training in rhetoric supplied him with a system of methodological persuasion that he would make use of when he

became commissioned by God to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. While some may argue that Paul did not employ the wisdom or teaching of the pagan world to accomplish his end goals – and use 1 Corinthians 1-3 as proof for their position – it will be argued in an upcoming chapter that such a stance fails to make a distinction between the message of Paul and his method.

## **2.5 THE EXPERIENCE AND COMMISSIONING OF PAUL**

A study of Paul's background would certainly not be complete without a brief review and analysis of his conversion experience and the commissioning of God that initiated his Christian evangelistic campaign. Of course, much could be said on this subject, but for our aim, we wish to uncover what factors of Paul's encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus would later present themselves in his apologetic methodology and personal witness. In the five retellings of Paul's conversion in the book of Acts, there are repeated elements which appear to be central to his mission and commissioning. Meeks and Fitzgerald identify three core significances of Paul's experience: First, it marked his conversion to Christianity; second, it constituted his call to be a prophet; and third, it served as his commission to be an apostle (Meeks and Fitzgerald, 2007: xxii). These three points may be broken down into the following more intimate considerations: (1) Paul was specifically chosen, set aside, and prepared by the Lord for the work that he would do; (2) Paul was sent as a witness to not just the Jews, but the Gentiles as well; (3) Paul's evangelistic mission and developed apologetic of the Christian faith would encounter rejection and require suffering; (4) Paul would bring light to people who were born into and currently lived in darkness; (5) Paul would preach a repentance that was required prior to a person's acceptance into the Christian faith; (6) Paul's witness would be grounded in space-time history and be based on his Damascus Road experience: what he had personally seen and heard (Witherington, 1998B: 319). Each of these points will now be briefly explored in an attempt to uncover information that may help us get a better grasp of the apologetic framework Paul would later utilize in his evangelistic activities.

### 2.5.1 The Election of Paul

In Acts 9:15, Scripture records that when Ananias, in a vision he is granted by Jesus, objects to coming into personal contact with a man named Saul of Tarsus, he is told by Christ that Paul is a “chosen instrument of Mine”. The word “chosen” - ἐκλογῆς - means exactly what the NASB interprets it to be: “choice”, “election”, (Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, 2000). It is used by Paul himself in five places in his epistles, but never does he use it in reference to himself. Instead he uses it four times in Romans (9:11, 11:5, 11:7, and 11:28) to refer to God’s election of His chosen ones (primarily Jews) and one time in 1 Thessalonians (1:4) of God’s election of His saints.

But this should not be misconstrued to think that Paul did not think himself chosen of God. Paul describes his conversion in prophetic form with perhaps even an echo from Jeremiah 1:5 being heard in Galatians 1:15: "But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb and called me..." In addition to Jeremiah, Isaiah 49:1-6 may also be alluded to in Paul’s description of his conversion in Galatians. It may be argued that a key observation in Paul’s description of his calling, and those of both Jews and Gentiles alike, is that nowhere does he refer to ‘making a decision for Christ’ as people do today, but is saying that before he was born, God decided that Paul would be his witness to the Gentiles - that he was elected by God to his salvation and position. It is also noteworthy that the verb “preach” in vs. 16 is in the present tense, but the verbs “set apart” and “called” are in the aorist or past tense (Witherington, 1998: 75). From this evidence we can deduce that Paul believed God was active in the lives of His creation and intervened to call out His chosen ones to the faith and destiny that He had prepared before the foundation of the world.

## 2.5.2 The Audience of Paul

Paul was most definitely concerned with the salvation of his own people as evidenced in numerous places throughout the book of Acts (e.g. chapters 13 and 14), with the evidence being most strong in Romans, chapters 9-11, and specifically Romans 9:1-5. Although we have weighty confirmation that Paul most certainly viewed the practice of various Jewish laws obsolete, he was not above carrying out certain aspects of Jewish customs if he thought they might assist him in his evangelism (e.g. Acts 21:15-26).

One question to ask (with respect to Paul's Jewish audience) is at what point or level Paul would have to start with a Jew to preach Christ versus a pagan Gentile? Witherington argues that most conversionist groups and sects of the first century did not involve the practice of standard Graeco-Roman religions but Eastern religions instead (e.g. the cult of Isis). That being the case, he believes that the ideological distance Paul would need to travel from one form of early Judaism to an offshoot of Judaism such as Christianity was considerably less than the distance involved in a conversion from worshipping Baal or Isis to Yahweh and His Son (Witherington, 1998: 76).

With respect to his commissioning for Gentile evangelism, Paul approached the task with zeal. Perhaps his energy came from a conviction that he was a figure of eschatological significance - that he had been called out by God to directly participate in the progress of salvation's history with the Gentiles (Bruce, 1977: 146). And yet such a thing did not signal that his mission would be an easy or unique one. To the world at large, Paul, the missionary, was just one of the many travelling speakers who then went across the land in the service of some philosophical or religious idea, a "setter forth of strange demons" as his Gentile prospects would say of him in Acts 17:18. There was also no lack of religious emissaries in Paul's milieu - his was the age of missions through the great migration of heathen deities, which transplanted eastern cults into the West and North and Graeco-Roman cults into the East. Examples of such activities

abound. On the one hand, Judaism in general, and especially the Pharisees made missionary activity a key agenda item ("you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte" - Matt. 23:15). The Ephesian disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19) also surely suggest the conclusion that there had been some sort of Baptist propaganda underway at that time (Deissmann, 1957: 226). Paul's missionary work would be yet another voice of religious thought now added to the mix.

### **2.5.3 The Rejection and Opposition to Paul's Apologetic**

If the success of Paul's apologetic and evangelistic mission were to be measured by the small amount of opposition, his mission would be regarded as a catastrophic failure. This would be in keeping with Christ's statement made to Ananias: "for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:16). The book of Acts alone chronicles more than 20 different episodes of rejection and opposition to Paul's message of salvation (9:23-25, 9:29, 13:8, 13:45, 13:50, 14:2-5, 14:19, 16:19-24, 17:5-32, 18:6-12, 19:9-23, 20:3-19, 21:27-31, 22:18, 23:2-12, 24:1-9, 25:2-24, 26:21, 28:22). We should also take seriously the litany of opposition and rejection that Paul lays out in 2 Cor. 11:23-27. In truth, such hostility and dismissal is to be expected given his audience; a crucified deliverer was to the Greeks an absurd contradiction in terms, just as to Jews a crucified Messiah was a piece of scandalous blasphemy (Bruce, 1977: 253).

Paul's enemies comprised a trinity. First, there were the spiritual enemies indicated in his writings that he was acutely aware of (e.g. 1 Thess. 2:18). Next, there were his already mentioned initial target audience of both Jews and Gentiles, many of whom would mistreat and dismiss him. Lastly came the one that, it could be argued, perhaps caused him the most grief - the early Church itself.

The fact that Paul was seen as strange and questionable not merely by fellow Jews but also by a number of fellow Jewish Christians, was no doubt hurtful to

him. It would be one thing for Paul's authority and authenticity to be challenged outside the Body of Christ, but inside was a different foe with which he had to wrestle. 1 Cor. 9:1-3 is an example as are many others where Paul insists to the *ekklēsia* that he was commissioned by Christ (others include Rom. 1:5, 1 Cor. 1:1-2, 2 Cor. 1:1, Gal, 1:1). Witherington even believes that 2 Cor. 11:26 suggests that there was a plot to murder Paul – a plot formed by other Christians (Witherington, 1998B: 322).

Such combined opposition – lost humanity, spiritual adversaries, and distrusting brethren – certainly must have caused the Apostle to despair at times, with evidence being present in his writings that he carried out his missionary work with the prospect of martyrdom before his eyes (Phil. 2:17), which ultimately turned out to be true. Paul was beheaded, tradition asserts, under the persecution of Nero at Aquae Salviae (now Tre Fontane) near the third milestone on the Ostian Way. Constantine built a small basilica in Paul's honor by A.D. 324, which was discovered in 1835 during excavations preceding the erection of the present basilica. On one of the floors was found *PAVLO APOSTOLO MART* – "To Paul, apostle and martyr" (Bruce, 1977: 450).

#### **2.5.4 The Illuminating Aspect of Paul's Message**

In Paul's retelling of his conversion event in Acts 26, he provides his audience of King Agrippa, Bernice, and Festus with more information than previously told through the pen of Luke regarding the statements made by Christ to him on the Damascus Road. Paul says that part of his mission was: "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). Thus, from the very outset of Paul's mission, he knew that part of his assignment was to bring light to his prospects that were in darkness and currently residing in enemy territory.

This aspect of Paul's evangelistic message can be seen in his writing to the Ephesians where he communicates to them: "for you were formerly darkness,

but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light" (Ephesians 5:8). This transference from darkness to light would be accomplished via Paul's simple message of the cross and Christ – a fact he makes clear to the Corinthians: "For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:5-6).

### **2.5.5 Paul's Preaching of Repentance**

As with the illuminating aspect of Paul's message, we also find him in Acts 26 making statements about the part repentance was to play in his message - "'So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance" (Acts 26:19-20). There are four occurrences in Paul's writings of the word μετάνοια and one of μετανοέω, and each refer to the concept of changing one's mind and conversion (Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, 2000).

Another relevant observation to make about Paul's statement of repentance is that he indicated there should be tangible evidence of a person's changed heart and mind, with the proof being that they will be "performing deeds appropriate to repentance". The word used in the NASB – 'appropriate' – is ἄξια which communicates a weightiness or worthiness to a thing, a correspondence to an object (Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, 2000). In other words, for Paul, repentance and corresponding action go hand in hand.

## 2.5.6 The Historical Foundation of Paul's Personal Apologetic

The final element of Paul's experience and commissioning is critical – the fact that he personally encountered the risen Christ and lived through an incident that was grounded in space-time history. His experience took place in a real location that would be known to all who lived in that region: Damascus, which has been said to be the oldest, continuously inhabited city in the world, being mentioned in Gen. 14:15 and 15:2 (Bruce, 1977: 76).

Before Gamaliel's pupil came to a proper assessment of the ministry entrusted to him by God and the death of Jesus, a revolution had to take place in his life and thought (Bruce, 1977: 61). Paul would later say that he was “apprehended” by Jesus (Phil. 3:12) on the road to Damascus – a term (κατελήμφθην) that means to make something one's own or gain control of someone through pursuit (Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, 2000). In Acts 9, we clearly see the use of miracles on display in Paul's conversion, the point of which is to make clear that God is in control of and directing all the events, so that Paul will undertake certain tasks God has in mind – something the former Saul would never have had any intention of doing (Witherington, 1998B: 318).

Although there are many observations that can be made about Paul's Damascus Road conversion, for our purposes of gaining a better understanding of what would enter into his formula for his yet-to-be developed apologetic framework, there are two key items of interest. First is the fact that Paul's life would become Christocentric after his experience. After his encounter with Christ, Paul's understanding of the Messiah had been revolutionized and it did not take long before he is found immediately proclaiming: “He [Jesus] is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20). Therefore, we should expect to find Christ at the heart of his apologetic methodology.

Second, we note that in Paul's conversion there are no positive antecedents or precursory events that led him from being a zealous opponent to a fervent

proponent of Christ (Witherington, 1998: 249). One minute Paul had been an enemy of Jesus and the next he had become a captive to the Christ he had once persecuted. Although this is certainly true of Paul, it is unlikely that he would expect every person's conversion to Christianity to be the same as his – an immediate change of heart. But what Paul may have expected would be that each convert would end up as he did, a new creation, which is much like the first one, a matter of God's calling into existence "the things that do not exist" (Rom. 4:17). Paul says, "By the grace of God, I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10), indicating he was transformed by God, became truly spiritual, and he was one whom Christ possessed and was now a Christ-bearer himself (Deissmann, 1957: 153).

After the Damascus experience Paul first went to Arabia, but whether he actually began his missionary work there cannot be ascertained. What is more likely is that he earnestly desired a time of quiet recollection. Then after a short stay in Jerusalem, he worked as a missionary in Syria and Cilicia (that is for the most part in Antioch on the Orontes and in his native city of Tarsus) and after that in company with Barnabas in Cyprus, in Pamphylia, Pisidia, and Lycaonia (Deissmann, 1957: 247).

### **2.5.7 Summary**

The six specific themes that ran through Christ's revelations to Paul on the Damascus Road would be expected to set the stage for the foundation of his evangelistic and apologetic message that he would bring to both the Jews and Gentiles. The conclusions that come from these themes are brief, yet important to understand before we can progress to making an attempt to ferret out the actual apologetic framework Paul would formulate.

Whether Paul first learned the concept of election in his initial encounter with Christ or whether it was just grounded via his previous education and experience cannot be said, but one would anticipate that the belief of being

chosen by God would make itself known later in his missionary speeches and corpus. The composition of his audience would mean that he would likely need to develop a framework that would accommodate both those who already possessed knowledge of Yahweh as well as those who did not. Because of the promise of suffering from Christ, the measuring rod of his evangelistic success would probably not be determined by the lack of opposition or rejection, but would have to be evaluated in a different manner.

His rejection would primarily come through people who were born into darkness, which is where Paul would find them; his mission was to bring them light that would open their eyes to the truth of God's Gospel. This Gospel required a repentance that was a necessary prerequisite before an unbeliever could understand that they had a need for a savior. Finally, Paul's message would ground itself in an actual experience that took place in space/time history, and one that could arguably be said to serve as a personal foundation of confidence for the Apostle that he used to capture the hearts of his audiences who lived in a culture where storytelling was a primary form of truth bearing.

## **2.6 CHAPTER CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this chapter has been to briefly examine a number of topics that lend insight into the culture of Paul's era, with special attention being given to the religious and primary philosophical climate of his day. We have also attempted to gain an understanding of the background and education of Paul as well as his Damascus Road conversion in hopes of finding information that would help in uncovering the Apostle's apologetic framework that he would later construct.

With respect to the culture of Paul, the key attributes worth noting appear to be a growing cosmopolitanism, a broadening of individual freedom, and a renewed interest in spiritual and religious matters, all of which would – on the surface – appear to have contributed positively to a new evangelist's message.

Negative traits present may have been the political challenges of emperor worship and the strong syncretistic tendencies of the day, which may have helped form worldviews that would be resistant to the exclusive message that Paul would be proclaiming.

This exclusivistic message would compete with a number of both religious and philosophic movements, with the primary religious challengers being the mystery religions/cults and Hellenistic Judaism, and the key opponent in the area of philosophy likely to be Stoicism. Both the religious and philosophical opponents attempted to supply the people of the first century a *soteria* so that they could find a release from the weight of finitude, and the mire of everyday human life. The populace was evidently quite eager to hear proclamations of salvation that bore more robustness than the former Greek and Roman gods, which had proved to be less than able.

Into this spiritual setting would come Paul, whose personal make-up was a trinitarian composition of Jew, Roman, and Pharisee. His formal secular and religious education may have prepared him well to do battle against all opponents to the message he had been asked to carry. From his background, it would be safe to argue that Paul was not an average wordsmith and certainly no unskilled preacher, despite his rhetoric about proclaiming to the Corinthians nothing but Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). Paul partook fully of a rhetorically saturated oral culture and would use his learning of rhetoric to his advantage in numerous ways, but would not compromise the integrity of his message through fanciful oral practice.

It should also be noted that Paul's own age saw nothing remarkable in the travelling tent-maker; nothing that would give a person pause over the other itinerant proclaimers of deities that existed during the same time. To the Roman official, before whose tribunal he was brought by the denunciation of malicious adversaries, he was an obscure Jew, or perhaps a mad enthusiast (Acts 26:24). By and large, the leading men of his time (especially the literary leaders) took

no notice whatsoever of the traveler, and when Paul did happen to come into contact with philosophers (as in Athens) they either put him off or abused him and regarded him as a ridiculous personage (“what has this miserable babbler to say?”, Acts 17:18).

In the next chapter, we will make an attempt at locating the apologetic framework of Paul by primarily examining his first letter to the Thessalonians and then other passages in his epistles and the book of Acts.

## CHAPTER 3: AN ATTEMPT TO DISCOVER PAUL'S APOLOGETIC FRAMEWORK

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to briefly examine the New Testament – in particular the book of Acts and the Pauline corpus – in order to discover the apologetic framework and methodology used by the Apostle Paul in engaging the non-Christian philosophical and religious movements of his day and in making disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. The resulting information will then be explored in much greater detail in the next chapter so a comprehensive understanding of Paul's system can be gained. To help achieve the goal of this chapter, three core topics will be addressed.

First, because information about Paul's missionary activities are primarily chronicled in the book of Acts, it will be necessary to briefly cover the One- vs. Two-Paul debate, which discusses whether the information about Paul contained in Acts is historical and trustworthy. The positions of both sides will be presented and arguments will be made for the school of thought that will be used throughout the rest of this thesis where Paul, in both Acts and his writings, is concerned.

Next, an attempt will be made to locate, within the New Testament, the apologetic methodology that Paul used with his first century audience. Once found, a cursory grammatical-historical exegesis of key passages will be performed (along with information gleaned from various Biblical commentaries) in order to understand the general make-up and structure of the Apostle's framework.

Lastly, an inquiry into whether Paul's apologetic framework is applicable to the current era will be performed. In order to satisfactorily answer the question of whether the Apostle's method is relevant for today, some guiding

hermeneutical principles will be presented along with Biblical evidence that assists in making the determination.

So the aim of this chapter, therefore, is to accurately identify Paul's apologetic system using the New Testament book of Acts and the Pauline corpus, with consideration for the reliability of the texts in question, and ascertain whether the Apostle's method applies to the present day. Let's begin by first discussing the question of Acts and the efficacy of its use in the rest of this thesis.

## **3.2 A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF THE ONE- VS. TWO-PAUL DEBATE**

Before an inquiry into Paul's apologetic framework is undertaken, we must explore the debate surrounding Paul's activities in the book of Acts since it will be used as one of the primary source materials for our investigation. Because there is no missionary letter within the Apostle's corpus, the book of Acts is the only biblical window we have available into Paul's activities and defenses of the gospel with unbelievers. That being the case, it must be determined whether it is reliable insofar as its record of Paul is concerned.

At issue is whether the Paul of Acts and the Paul of the epistles that bear his name are one and the same. This debate is not a small one with Gasque saying, "there is probably no other area of New Testament research in which scholarly opinion is so divided" (Gasque, 1969: 69).

### **3.2.1 A Synopsis of the Two-Paul View**

The Two-Paul school of thought is represented by scholars such as Vielhauer who is often credited for sparking the debate. Vielhauer objects to the Paul in Acts as being the same Paul in the epistles on four general grounds: (1) The Paul of Acts shows a natural theology closer to the later apologists than that of the real Paul; (2) The Paul in Acts has a positive view of the Jewish law whereas

the real Paul did not; (3) There are Christological differences between the two Pauls that are found in Acts and the epistles; (4) The Lukan Paul's eschatology is different than that of the real Paul (cf. Vielhauer, 1966: 33-50). Such supposed difference prompts Brawley to say, "The problem with the Lucan Paul in its briefest form is that the Paul of the Epistles is a different Paul" (Brawley, 1987: 129).

Gasque argues that, regardless of the scholar (Vielhauer, Haenchen, Brawley, etc.), those espousing a two-Paul view typically exhibit five, broad suppositions. First, they stress that the author of Acts is more of a creative artist than a true historian; that the goal of the author is to edify his audience rather than accurately report true events in detail. Second, the author of Acts is theologically biased and therefore may either omit certain facts or selectively report events so they fit nicely into his framework. Third, the events in Acts represent not the apostolic age, but rather the post-apostolic Church. Fourth, the writing is of a later date (A.D. 90 or later) and portrays the Church of that time period rather than immediately after the death of Christ (A.D. 30-60). Lastly, the author of Acts simply does not understand Paul in a real sense and substitutes his own theology in place of the Apostle's (Gasque, 1969: 69-72).

### **3.2.2 A Look at Arguments for the One-Paul View**

The One-Paul school is represented by scholars such as Bruce, Rackham, and Witherington. They simply see only one Paul in both Acts and the epistles, and find consistency in the books where the Two-Paul school sees disharmony.

With the two positions being briefly stated, we now turn to the question of if the arguments for the One-Paul system of thought answer the charges of the Two-Paul school with any force.

In response to the point that the author of Acts was more of a storyteller than accurate historian, Hemer counters by noting an early dating for Acts and over

one hundred precise historic details in the book (cf. Hemer, 1990). One of his arguments is: why would the author fabricate Paul's actions while recording such accurate accounts of geographic, political, and Church history? Campbell's work (cf. Campbell, 1955: 80-87) supports Hemer on this point. Of Campbell's research, Kümmel says, "Campbell has proved convincingly that the sequence of Paul's missionary activities that can be inferred from his letters is so remarkably compatible with the information from Acts that we have good ground for deriving the relative chronology of Paul's activity from a critical combination of the information from Paul's letters with the account in Acts" (Kümmel, 1975: 254).

However, one could argue that certain contemporary authors that write fiction take great pains to get such details correct in their books while completely inventing their main character. Perhaps the author of Acts did the exact same thing.

Regarding the theological motives of the Acts author, it is helpful to consider that Acts is written in an episodic and selective manner, which is in keeping with an account that sees Paul not in a theological manner, but more as missionary and church planter. The work shows Paul responding to certain situations rather than being devoted to full expositions of Paul's theology. This would not be out of character with historians in general, where we find that it is typical to select portions of the accounts they record. Such selectivity does not negate the truthfulness and accuracy of what they do decide to document, which is a distinct possibility regarding the historical style of the book of Acts.

Vielhauer argues that the Paul of Acts demonstrates a different theology than that of the Pauline letters. However, there are indications and parallels of Pauline theology in Acts and the epistles that are quite evident. In Paul's famous Areopagus speech in Acts 17, he exhorts his listeners to abandon idols in favor of the One who created the world, and in 1 Thess. 1:9 there is found the exact same thought: "For they themselves report about us what kind of a

reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God". In fact, this was Demetrius' complaint about Paul in Acts 19: "You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all" (Acts 19:26).

With respect to Vielhauer's charge of the differences in Paul's attitude toward the Jewish law, it should not be thought unusual to see Paul observing certain Jewish customs in Acts. In 1 Corinthians we see the same man who wrote, "To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). Moreover, Paul is not exhibited to be a completely observant Jew in Acts; for example, he has fellowship with and stays at the homes of Gentiles (cf. Acts 16). Another illustration is found in the following passage:

"After he [Paul] had greeted them [the Jerusalem brethren], he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it they began glorifying God; and they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs"" (Acts 21:19-21).

Responding to Two-Paul proponents such as Vielhauer and Haenchen, Walton calls their position "overstated" and argues for a One-Paul approach based on similarities found in the Miletus speech contained in Acts 20 and the Apostle's letters (cf. Walton, 2007). The Miletus speech is the only epistle-like situation found in Acts and Walton contends it is a key 'test case' for comparing the Paul of Acts with the Pauline Corpus. His conclusion is that the speech does indeed parallel the language and ideas in Paul's letters and therefore the Paul in Acts and the rest of the New Testament are one and the same (Walton, 2007: 213).

While the debate continues, I believe the above arguments for the One-Paul school present a strong case in response to the objections of those holding to the Two-Paul view. As such, for this investigation, I will use the One-Paul school and regard the information contained in the book of Acts as historically accurate where Paul is concerned.

### **3.2.3 The Broad Question of Acts' Historicity**

Before concluding this section, a word needs to be mentioned regarding the overall historicity and trustworthiness of Acts, and the events contained within the work. Commenting on whether the author of Acts intended his work to be viewed and read as a historical account, Ehrman says, "Luke meant to write a history of early Christianity, not a novel. Indeed, all of the ancient Christian authors who refer to the book appear to have understood it in this way" (Ehrman, 2007: 143). Parsons agrees by saying that the author of Acts was "deeply committed to historical verisimilitude, a determination that rests in part on Luke's determination to get the story straight" (Parsons, 2008: 7-8).

The author of Acts appears to follow the guidelines for recording history as imposed by Greek historians such as Thucydides and Polybius, who recommended that a historian not merely investigate sources, and consult eyewitnesses, but also be a participant in at least some of the recounted events. The famous "we" passages that start in Acts 16 give evidence that the author was evidently adhering to this mandate. No detractor has yet produced compelling evidence from any ancient historical document that such "we" passages in a historiographical work such as Acts were ever added purely for verisimilitude or as a veiled claim to be using a source written by another.

Moreover, Witherington states: "Luke is not writing either about remote utopian societies, secret religious sects and rites, or words and deeds that he feels are immune to historical scrutiny. His claim is that the Jesus movement and the rise of Christianity are real historical phenomena that at least from time

to time touch on the larger historical events and processes of the Empire and so are subject to careful historical scrutiny in an ancient mode, which is to say, with some openness to claims about the supernatural” (Witherington, 1998B: 32).

What about questions as to chronology or historical data where the Pauline corpus and the book of Acts appear to conflict? In regard to Paul’s writings, Witherington suggests that the Apostle’s work does not show a man who is necessarily disinterested in getting historical facts straight, but rather one whose comments are ad hoc, occasional, selective, and often highly rhetorical, intended as part of an act of persuasion (e.g. Galatians 1-2). As an example, Witherington provides 10 pages (cf. 87-97 in *Acts*) of proof points reconciling the supposed differences between Paul’s Galatian chronological data and that found in Acts.

So to quickly summarize, there is good evidence to suggest that the author of Acts intended his audience to view and read his work as historical narrative. Also, being historical narrative, Acts offers direct evidence about events, speeches, locations, and persons in a way that is not true of Paul’s letters. Lastly, the “we” passages in Acts suggest the author was an eyewitness of a good deal of the material in the last eight chapters of Acts and was a companion of Paul, who could easily be consulted in regard to the accuracy of what was written down (Witherington, 1998B: 87-88).

### 3.3 AN INITIAL INQUIRY INTO PAUL'S APOLOGETICS

With respect to Church history, the period from about A. D. 150-300 is typically referred to as the age of the apologists (Hannah, 2001: 40). After the period of the apostles and the very early Church, Christianity came under attack from at least two directions. On the one hand, there were those who challenged the truthfulness of the Christian message and assigned the Gospel to mere myth. On another front were those who altered the core of Christianity and began teaching heresies, which caused divisions and uproars within the body of Christ. To defend against those who contended that the Christian message was false and others who distorted the true teachings of the Church, a number of individuals rose up and directly met these challenges with arguments that spoke to the validity of the gospel and defended orthodox teaching. Somewhat unknown Christian defenders such as Quadratus Bishop of Athens, Claudius Apollinaris, bishop of Hierapolis, and Theophilus of Antioch were among the first apologists to appear while other better-known apologists such as Justin Martyr came afterwards (Enns, 1997).

From this period to the present day, there have been numerous others who have followed the first Christian apologists, defended the gospel against its critics, and adhered to the admonition found in 1 Peter 3:15: "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence". These *apologias* have typically been classified into a number of different systems that present key characteristics which serve to frame the approach the system takes with its audience. A brief review of these methods will be performed in the next chapter and will be compared to the Pauline framework identified in this chapter (that is plumbed in much greater detail within the next chapter) to determine which, if any, resemble the system Paul used. At this point, however, we need to begin our investigation into the New Testament (specifically the book of Acts and Paul's epistles) and see if we can

locate any succinct summation where Paul's methodology is either portrayed in a narrative scene in Acts or summed up within the pages of his own writings.

### 3.3.1 A Proposed Starting Point

A logical starting point for an investigation into Paul's apologetics would be to look at the passages in his letters where he uses the word *apologia* (ἀπολογία, defense). The term is used by Paul in five instances, viz. 1 Cor. 9:3, 2 Cor. 7:11; Phil. 1:7, Phil. 1:16 and 2 Tim. 4:16. Furthermore the verb *apologoumai* (ἀπολογέομαι) is used Rom. 2:15 and 2 Cor. 12:9. In most of these passages the *apologia* refers to a defense of Paul's apostleship against his opponents, or his personal defense against the authorities. The only passage in which Paul speaks of his *apologia* of the gospel (ἀπολογία τοῦ εὐαγγελίου), and which is therefore of direct relevance to Christian apologetics, is Phil. 1:16, where Paul explicitly states: "I am appointed for the defense of the gospel".

It is first important to have a brief look at Paul's view of the gospel that he says he is defending. The term εὐαγγέλιον is translated "good news" and was coined and popularized by the Greeks from the act of bringing good news to a military commander regarding activities upon the field of battle (Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, 2000). It is a term that Paul uses the most frequently of any other word in the New Testament to describe what he brought to unbelievers, with some 70 mentions across 65 verses. Paul prefaces the term mostly with "the" (84% of cases), which indicates that a sole rendition it existed, but he also personalizes the term at times with "our" (4%) and "my" (4%). The remainder include "a" (used in Galatians to speak of a false gospel) and "glorious" in 1 Tim. 1:11.

A look into other letters of Paul shows that he referred to the gospel in other various ways including "word of the cross" (1 Cor. 1:18), "God's wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:7), "mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1), "the word" (1 Cor. 15:2, 2 Tim. 4:2),

“message of truth” (Eph. 1:13), “word of truth” (Col. 1:5), “word of God” (Col. 1:25, 1 Thess. 2:13), “sound words” (1 Tim. 1:13), “things which you have heard from me” (2 Tim. 2:2), and “His word” (Tit. 1:3). The Apostle also identifies the gospel as being Christological in 1 Cor. 2:2 (“For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified”), 2 Cor. 1:19 (“For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us”), Eph. 4:20 (“But you did not learn Christ in this way”), and Col. 1:28 (“we proclaim Him”). That Christ is in the center of the Gospel preached by Paul, is also evident from Paul’s numerous references to τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“the gospel of Christ”), for example Rom. 15:19, 1 Cor. 9:12, 2 Cor. 10:14 and Gal. 1:7.

Paul pointedly identifies the source of his gospel as coming from a direct revelation from God and Christ Himself, which unites well with a number of the above references (e.g. “mysteries of God”, “sound words”). This is a point he explicitly states in Galatians: "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11-12). Paul chronicles this fact in a number of other epistles such as 2 Cor. 4:5-6 and Eph. 3:3. Also in the letters to the Thessalonians it is clear that the Apostle believed that what he brought to the Thessalonians was of supernatural origin, for he thanks God that the believers in Thessalonica accepted his message “not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God” (cf. 1 Thess. 2:13; cf. also 1 Thess. 4:8; 2 Thess. 2:14).

All of this leads to what I would now like to propose for the starting point of my investigation – a verse mentioned by Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians. The Apostle Paul first preached the message of Christ in Thessalonica during his second missionary journey. Paul and his fellow missionaries (Timothy, Silas, Luke, and perhaps others) found themselves in Troas after being unable to travel in other directions. It was in Troas that Paul received his vision of a man of Macedonia calling to him for help. Paul’s group responded to the vision, crossed into Europe, and first preached at Philippi. A

series of events caused the missionaries to leave Philippi where they pressed on approximately 100 miles westward along the Egnatian Way to the next major population center, Thessalonica (cf. Acts 17:1-9). Paul established a church there and later wrote two letters to the body instructing them in various things and issuing various eschatological corrections that were spawned from a possibly forged letter they had received and mistakenly attributed to him (cf. 2 Thess. 2).

In the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians, Paul is speaking to those in the church and makes a statement about the gospel that he brought to them during his missionary visit. He sums it up in this way in 1 Thess. 1:5: "for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake." Paul appears to separate the gospel that he delivered at Thessalonica into three components. First, he says that the gospel did not come to them "in word only". This statement indicates something obvious, which is that Paul's gospel contained a communicative message that was spoken and relayed to the Thessalonians. However, he adds the word "only" to show that his gospel contained more than just a spoken word.

Paul then moves on to another more lengthy description of a second element: "but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction". At first blush, it appears tempting to split this fragment up into three parts from the nouns that are present: "power", "the Holy Spirit", and "full conviction". Two of the nouns are quite familiar, with the Holy Spirit being the most recognizable. "Power" or *δύναμις* is also used quite frequently throughout the Bible, with the term being found 119 times in the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament version of Scripture. The word in this verse is linked to the Holy Spirit and should not to be confused with *δυνάμεις*, the plural of *δύναμις*, which literally means "miracles", but while the singular does not specify supernatural manifestations it also does not exclude them (Constable, 1995).

“Full conviction” – πολλή πληροφορία – the third term is the least recognizable of the three. It is found in only three other places in the New Testament (once in Colossians 2:2 and twice in Hebrews: 6:11, 10:22), with the word in each case meaning ‘A state of complete certainty’ (Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, 2000). This is intriguing as Danker’s Lexicon states 1 Thess. 1:5 communicates that a state of complete certainty in the gospel message was attained, which is obviously the desired end result of any apologetic or evangelistic delivery. But we are somewhat left in a state of uncertainty as to exactly whose conviction is being referenced – that of the messenger or that of the recipient? Thomas Constable argues that it refers to both parties (Constable, 1985) a position taken also by John MacArthur (MacArthur, 2003), while Robert Thomas asserts that it was the possession of the messengers only (Thomas, 2003). I will take the former stance, that the term “full conviction” refers to both parties for these reasons: (1) the Holy Spirit is the central focus of the above 1 Thess. 1:5 verse fragment; (2) an effect must resemble its cause (i.e. you cannot give what you do not have, which necessitates the messenger possessing the πληροφορία at a minimum); (3) Scripture teaches that the Spirit’s ministry is to convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8) so it is logical to conclude He would be actively performing His task through the Apostle’s message in the hearts of his listeners. All of this argues for a combining of the nouns in this verse fragment into a singular component.

There is a third and final component that Paul adds in 1 Thess. 1:5: “just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake”. Paul says that he brought the Thessalonians a spoken word that came in the Holy Spirit with power and conviction and then he moves the focus of the verse from the supernaturally revealed gospel and God the Holy Spirit onto himself and his traveling companions (“we”). This shift adds what on the surface appears to be the first solely human aspect to the verse and to Paul’s gospel.

Paul begins by saying, “you know” to his readers, which indicates that the Thessalonians had gained previous and personal knowledge of Paul and his

fellow missionaries. This information concerned “the kind of men” that the Apostle and his companions were. Although Paul does not explicitly say what kind of men they were (e.g. ‘good’ men’), the plain reading of the text appears to imply that a positive impression was conveyed and that it was externally proven to those at Thessalonica. This is confirmed a few verses later in the next chapter when Paul says, “But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children” (1 Thess. 2:7).

Paul says he and his companions proved (*γίνομαι*; literally come into existence; see Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, 2000) themselves “among you”, which implies that the effect was made through their personal interactions and living among the Thessalonians. Lastly, Paul says it (the character he and his fellow missionaries displayed) was done “for your sake”. This indicates their behavior delivered some sort of gain to the Thessalonians, although what exact benefit it was is not explicitly stated in the verse. Commenting on this portion of 1 Thess. 1:5, Toussaint’s says the Paul’s missionary party lived lives consistent with that message when they were in Thessalonica. The Thessalonian saints were fully aware of their teachers’ manner of life and that their motive was to profit the Thessalonians. From their life, Toussaint says, beautiful lives had blossomed (Toussaint, 1995).

Summing up what we have found in 1 Thess. 1:5, we have seen Paul refer to “our gospel”, which the Apostle succinctly defines as coming in a spoken word, in the Holy Spirit, and in a personal representation through himself and his fellow missionaries. This is what Paul brought to the Thessalonians and this is what he says he used to convert the unbelievers of that area.

Could this short description be a fair representation of Paul’s apologetic and evangelistic approach that he utilized with non-Christians? To answer that question, I will need to expand this investigation into more books of the New Testament. Specifically, I will look at the book of Acts and other letters of the

Pauline Corpus to see if this three-fold representation of the gospel found in 1 Thess. 1:5 is either described or prescribed elsewhere in part or in total.

### **3.4 EXPLORING THE BOOK OF ACTS**

Within the book of Acts, there are seven Pauline discourses recorded in chapters 13, 14, 17, 22, 24, 26, and 28. Paul's speeches in these chapters total 102 verses with the longest being found in chapter 13 (26 verses) and the shortest appearing in chapter 14 (3 verses). Paul's audience for his addresses cannot exactly be determined in a per speech fashion. At best we may be able to label the speeches as being directed to primarily Jewish gatherings in chapters 13, 22, and 28; mostly Gentile assemblies in chapters 14, and 17; and a mixture of both Jews and Gentiles in chapters 24 and 26. All these accounts certainly demonstrate the first component of Paul's gospel (the spoken word) is present in Acts. In the next chapter, this particular part of Paul's apologetic framework will be explored in much greater detail with respect to its exact contents and such, but for now, I simply note its presence is observed in many places within the book of Acts.

#### **3.4.1 Paul's Spoken Word and the Holy Spirit**

Paul's spoken word is combined with the second component of his gospel definition noted in 1 Thess. 1:5 (the Holy Spirit, power, and conviction) in a number of places in Acts. The Holy Spirit was promised by Christ to come upon His disciples in Acts 1:8, with the fact that they would receive 'power' being explicitly noted by Jesus in the verse: "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth". One of the best examples of Paul's spoken word and the Holy Spirit being shown together in a working relationship is contained in Acts 16.

Beginning in verse 13 of that chapter, the author of Acts records the fact that the missionaries traveled the 10 miles on the Via Egnatia, the Egnatian Road to Philippi, which is described as a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. Philippi, originally named *Crenides* ("Fountains"), was taken by Philip of Macedon and renamed after him. In 168 B.C. Philippi became a Roman possession (cf. Constable). The Jewish population at Philippi evidently was small because there was no synagogue there; standard practice dictated that 10 Jewish males were required for a synagogue. However, a place of prayer (cf. v. 16), which is a term the author also uses in Acts 6:9 and 9:2, is noted as being by the Gangites River about one and a half miles west of town.

It is here that the author of Acts introduces Lydia, whom he mentions specifically by name. This fact is somewhat significant as Roman women were normally called by their family's cognomen and not by their personal name. This indicates she was evidently of some status because women's names were generally not used unless they were either notorious or notable (Witherington, 1998B: 491). This fact may be established via the use of the term *πορφυρόπωλις* in verse 14, which indicates she was involved in a commerce that was of an imperial monopoly. She is also identified as being a "worshipper of God", a term generally used of Gentiles (cf. Acts 10:2, 17:4, 17:17) who were not converts to Judaism, but nevertheless were worshippers of the Lord.

In verse 13 of the chapter, the author states that it was to this woman (as well as other women who were assembled there) that Paul delivered his gospel: "And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled". So Paul's spoken word is definitely present, but then in the next verse we see God's Spirit also present and performing His role in the evangelistic encounter: "A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; *and the Lord opened her heart* to respond to the things spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14, emphasis added). The verse states that the Lord Himself was

the one who worked upon Lydia in a way such that she was able to respond to the spoken word of Paul. Just as Paul noted in 1 Thess. 1:5, his gospel did not just come in word only, but also in the Lord who performed a work in Lydia so that she became a believer.

But what of the “full conviction” that Paul also records in 1 Thess. 1:5? Is that noted anywhere in this account of Lydia and her conversion? It appears so. In verse 15, we read: “And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us””. The author of Acts notes that Lydia used a powerful rhetorical approach with Paul and his missionary team. So convinced was Lydia of the truthfulness of Paul’s gospel that she immediately demonstrated her new faith by bringing the men whom she evidently just met into her own home to stay with her family who had also just become believers.

What is not found in this account is the third component of Paul’s gospel recorded in 1 Thess. 1:5, which I identified previously as a personal reflection of the gospel in Paul’s life. Of course, Paul may have indeed demonstrated some personal attributes in this encounter that served as a mirror of the gospel, but there is no way of confirming that as it is not explicitly recorded. There are, however, a few places in Acts where Paul’s personal behavior is specifically cited and is done so with references also made to the spoken word that he brought to his evangelistic prospects.

### 3.4.2 Paul's Spoken Word and His Character

In Paul's Miletus speech, the Apostle first speaks to the word he brought the Ephesians:

“And when they had come to him, he said to them, “You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:18–21).

Then, later in the same speech, a brief glimpse into Paul's personal character is given: “You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me” (Acts 20:34). This same type of reference is found in a detail of Paul's disposition that he records in 1 Thessalonians: “For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.” (1 Thess. 2:9). Just as Paul stated to the Thessalonians that “you know what kind of men we proved to be among you”, Paul says the very same thing to the Ephesian believers. His personal behavior was part of the gospel he brought to them and it was something they distinctly knew.

A more subtle example of Paul's spoken word and his personal character being tied together in his gospel is found in the Apostle's legal hearing before Felix, which is recorded in Acts 24. After Tertullus finishes his complaint about Paul (cf. vv. 2-8), Paul is then allowed to present his defense before the governor. During his address, Paul makes a fleeting reference to the spoken message component of his gospel in verses 14-15: “But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked”. Right on the spoken word's heels, Paul then states, “In view of this, I also do my best to

maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men” (Acts 24:16). When Paul says “In view of this”, what is he speaking about? The pronoun “this” is dative and singular, which conveys that Paul is referring back to one thing for which he is doing something – in this case keeping his conscience blameless before both God and humanity. This one thing must be the collective beliefs he held and communicated to others that he just made in his prior statement.

Paul identified the type of conscience he endeavored to keep as ἀπρόσκοπον, which is a term he used in his epistles as well (1 Cor. 10:32 and Phil. 1:10), these being the only other two other times in the New Testament where the word is used. Paul says in Acts 24 that he sought to keep a conscience that was not offending and did not cause others to stumble. In 1 Thess. 1:5, Paul specifically stated that he maintained a certain character “for your sake”, which implied that the way Paul acted in relation to the Thessalonians was done for their benefit. Here in Acts 24, we find the Apostle saying his conscience is maintained for the benefit of others (i.e. so others would not stumble) as well.

### **3.4.3 Concluding Remarks on Acts**

The brief accounts above provide enough data to conclude that the three-fold representation of Paul’s gospel found in 1 Thess. 1:5 is present also in the book of Acts. While all three components are not specifically referenced in one particular pericope, two of the three constituents are found together in separate accounts, with the spoken word always being part of the equation.

I now turn to Paul’s epistles to see if the Apostle’s singular reference to his tripartite gospel made in 1 Thess. 1:5 can be confirmed elsewhere in his writings.

### **3.5 A SEARCH FOR OTHER EXAMPLES IN PAUL'S EPISTLES**

Of the nearly 8,000 verses in the New Testament, the writings of Paul (if all of the books between and including Romans-Philemon are attributed to the Apostle) take up approximately 25% or a little over 2,000 verses. Of the other writers, only John comes close to Paul in terms of overall contribution to the New Testament (1416 verses or 18%).

In his quarter of the New Testament, does Paul make any other references to a triad definition of his gospel that he mentions in 1 Thess. 1:5?

#### **3.5.1 The Word and the Holy Spirit**

There are clear, descriptive statements made by Paul in his writings that link his spoken message with the Holy Spirit and with power. One of the most unmistakable sets of verses that support this fact is found in the second chapter of 1 Corinthians. Here, the Apostle is speaking about his visit to the people and city of Corinth, and he writes:

“And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

Just as Paul told his readers at the beginning of 1 Thess. 1:5 that he and his gospel had come to them, the Apostle begins this section by stating “when I came to you”. He then goes on to say what he brought to the Corinthians by first describing what he limited his knowledge and message to (“Jesus Christ and Him crucified”).

After this, Paul makes mention of the personality traits he inwardly felt and/or externally exhibited. His mention of weakness is likely not speaking about his physical body, but more probably referring to his dependence upon God (cf. 2 Cor. 12:10). In the same way, Paul's statement of fear and trembling speak to his view of the Master he served (cf. Eph. 6:5; Phil. 2:12) rather than an actual fear of the people of Corinth. While it is certainly possible Paul exhibited these things in Thessalonica, the specific attributes do not seem on the surface to match the type of character Paul communicated in 1 Thess. 1:5, so that aspect of the Thessalonian verse cannot be said to be present here with any certainty.

However, what is at hand is a mention of the Holy Spirit and power, which is most certainly found in 1 Thess. 1:5. And just as the spoken word does not seem to be the main emphasis in the Thessalonians verse, but rather the Spirit is, the Spirit is also stressed in 1 Corinthians. In fact, Paul himself explicitly states that the end result of his preaching – the faith of the Corinthian believers – rests solely on the power of God. The end conclusion is, then, that Paul's spoken word and the Holy Spirit coupled with a mention of His power are matched with the definition of Paul's gospel found in 1 Thess. 1:5.

There are at least three more examples of the union between the Spirit and Paul's spoken word that are worth mentioning. The first is found near the end of the book of Romans: "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 15:18-19). While all prior verses that have been examined started with the message portion of Paul's gospel first, these verses in Romans lead with the Spirit and conclude with a mention of the preaching aspect of the gospel. What is particularly worth noting here is the breadth of application that Paul references. He says that he had preached the gospel message in conjunction with the power of the Holy Spirit "from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum". This is the only New Testament

reference to Illyricum. The prepositional phrase "about as far as" may either be exclusive or inclusive. But since there is no indication in Acts of any extension of Paul's journeys beyond the confines of Macedonia, and since the phrase, "I have fully preached," precludes a reference to a cursory excursion in Illyricum, we should probably take the prepositional phrase in its exclusive sense, and understand that Paul claims to have evangelized Macedonia as far as the border of Illyricum. Nevertheless, this is valuable information to have because it helps confirm a consistent pattern in the way in which Paul conducted his evangelism. His spoken word and the Spirit always worked together no matter how far out his missionary travels took him.

Another reference that helps shed insight on the workings of Paul's gospel message and the Spirit combination is found in the book of Galatians: "This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:2-3). Paul's rhetorical question points to the time of their conversions, when they received the Holy Spirit (cf. 4:6). The phrase "hearing with faith" certainly denotes the presence of the preaching side of the Apostle's gospel (also cf. Rom. 10:17). The verb ἐνάρχομαι is only found in one other place in the New Testament (Phil. 1:6). There appears to be a double contrast, between ἐνάρχομαι and ἐπιτελεῖσθε as in 2 Cor. 8:6 and Phil. 1:6, and also between πνεύματι and σαρκί; there is perhaps some sharp irony present in Paul's quick literary thrust. The key thing worth noting is the fact that Paul says the Galatian believers were "begun" by the Holy Spirit, which indicates the Lord was present at the very outset of their conversion and mated completely with the message that was brought to them.

A third mention of the spoken word and Spirit's united partnership is located in the book of Ephesians: "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13). The phrase "you also" is used by Paul to refer to the Gentiles whom he contrasts with the Jews (cf. Eph. 1:11-

12). Paul says that his Gentile readers listened to the message of truth (cf. Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15), which he calls “the gospel of your salvation” (cf. Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15; James 1:18) and when they believed the spoken word, they were also sealed with Holy Spirit. The King James Version implies that the Holy Spirit’s sealing occurred after the Ephesians heard the message and believed (“after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise”). However, Hoehner argues this is an incorrect interpretation and says the message and Spirit came together at the same time. The last part of verse 13 is literally, “They were sealed in Him [Christ] with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Hoehner, 1995). The word “seal” indicates security (Matt. 27:66; Eph. 4:30), authentication and approval (John 6:27), certification of genuineness (John 3:33), and identification of ownership (2 Cor. 1:22; Rev. 7:2; 9:4).

### **3.5.2 A Possible Second Summation of Paul’s Gospel**

There is one other possible summation of Paul’s gospel and apologetic framework, besides the one found in 1 Thess. 1:5, that is worth reviewing. In 2 Corinthians, part of Paul’s epistle is devoted to defending his ministry. In chapter six he describes how he meticulously avoided any behavior that would invalidate his ministry as Christ’s ambassador (5:20) and God’s fellow worker (6:1). He elaborates by saying this:

“And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain – for He says, “AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU.” Behold, now is “THE ACCEPTABLE TIME,” behold, now is “THE DAY OF SALVATION” – giving no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited, but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, *in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the word of truth, in the power of God*” (2 Cor. 6:1-7, emphasis added).

Near the end in this set of verses, we find a grouping together of the same components found in 1 Thess. 1:5. The phrase “in the Holy Spirit” may be a

metonymy, a figure of speech in which the cause stands for the effects. If so, then the Holy Spirit represents that which He causes in the lives of those who received Paul's message.

Paul's mention of "genuine love" (ἀνυποκρίτως ἀγάπη) is certainly a description of how he acted toward the Corinthian people and can be linked back to the character Paul quickly refers to in 1 Thess. 1:5. The Apostle's brief mention of his behavior in the key verse we have been examining is expanded in more detail in the second chapter of 1 Thessalonians where he describes more fully how (in genuine love) he treated those in Thessalonica:

"We proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." (1 Thess. 2:7-12)

As I have already mentioned earlier in this chapter, "word of truth" is a reference to Paul's spoken word - the gospel message that he carried (cf. Col 1:5). So in these verses found in 2 Corinthians, we have in Paul's writings a grouping together of the same elements that are found in 1 Thess. 1:5 as a description of the Apostle's gospel framework.

### 3.5.3 Concluding Remarks on Paul's Epistles

This brief study of the Pauline corpus demonstrates that the triad definition found in 1 Thess. 1:5 is indeed mentioned either in part or whole in other places of Paul's writings. Therefore, it does not stretch credulity to maintain that this three-fold description of the gospel was indeed a global reference to what Paul used as a framework for his dealings with unbelievers.

This system will be explored in much greater detail in the next chapter. For now, I will simply give this framework the label of *tria martus*, or 'three witness' apologetics, which will be used throughout the rest of this thesis to refer to Paul's apologetic framework.

However, before we can move into a deeper examination of Paul's system, we must first address the question of whether this framework is simply being described in the pages of Acts and Paul's epistles, or if it is prescriptive in nature and something that apologists should be using today.

## 3.6 PAUL'S APOLOGETICS: DESCRIPTIVE OR PRESCRIPTIVE?

From a global standpoint, Paul speaks in his writings about the fact that Scripture should be followed and practiced. Perhaps his most mentioned statement on this topic is found in his second letter to Timothy: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Paul also emphasized that Scripture's message is relevant for later generations and not just its original readers. For example, Paul warned the believers in Corinth about the dangers of idolatry and immorality by reminding them about God's judgments that had occurred to the nation of Israel centuries before. Even though those individuals lived in a different age than the believers he addressed at Corinth, he said to them: "Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil

things as they also craved” (1 Cor. 10:6). This is a principle the Apostle repeated elsewhere to other audiences such as to those at Rome: “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction” (Rom. 15:4).

These facts do not exclude the fact that care should be taken to avoid misapplications of God’s Word. In this specific case, what we want to determine is whether the *tria martus* apologetic framework identified in 1 Thess. 1:5 and elsewhere in the New Testament is something that is prescribed for today’s apologists. In order to determine this, we will need to apply a reasonable set of guidelines to the passages of Scripture that have been covered in previous sections as well as ask and answer some key questions that specifically address Paul’s three-fold apologetics structure.

### **3.6.1 Some Guiding Principles for Determining a Prescriptive Application**

Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard note three errors that result in a misapplication of Scripture to modern times and circumstances: (1) Total neglect of any context; (2) Partial neglect of the literary or historical context of a passage; (3) Insufficiently analogous situations (Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard, 2004: 480-82). To help avoid these mistakes, Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard recommend a simple, two-step process that Bible exegetes should employ when deciding whether a portion of Scripture is applicable to today. First, they advise that the reader determine the original application(s) intended by the passage in question. Second, they suggest that the passage be evaluated in light of the specificity of those applications to their original historical situations. If the original specific applications are transferable across time and space to other audiences, then the reader should apply them in culturally appropriate ways (Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard, 2004: 483).

Where matters of the gospel are concerned, Goldsworthy argues that the entire New Testament should be viewed as a contextualizing literary and theological activity - one that spreads globally across all time and cultures. He says there is

one world and one human race that is fallen and under the judgment of God (cf. Rom. 5:12). God's creation in His image has established a cultural unity in all humankind and it is the metacultural paradigm that has contact with all human beings. God's plan of salvation involves his direct involvement with all peoples, but one that was done through a distinct and elect nation (Israel). Even so, the cultural norm for New Testament times is the new person in Christ and the Church as Christ's body. In this sense, the proclamation of the gospel to those of different cultures is never done apart from the cultural context of the saving activity of God as revealed in His word. This being true, Goldsworthy states that the centrality of the gospel as the meaning of all Scripture and the hermeneutical key to all reality should remind us that no transformation is valid that detracts from the gospel or its definitions found in the New Testament. The fixed point, Goldsworthy says, is Jesus Christ – the Jewish God-Man who is descended from David according to the flesh and shown by His resurrection to be the Son of God – and His gospel (Goldsworthy, 2006: 285-87).

### **3.6.2 Questions and Answers for the Application of Paul's Framework**

Keeping the recommendations above in mind, can we confirm that Paul's 1 Thess. 1:5 framework is a template or model that is meant to be used outside the Apostle's first century context? Before that question is answered, some clarification is warranted: at this point I am not concerned with the detailed content of Paul's message (i.e. should contemporary apologists say the exact same things Paul did to unbelievers), how the Holy Spirit worked with Paul and non-Christians, or the specific attributes of Paul's character that positively assisted his evangelistic / apologetic missions. Those areas will be explored in much further detail in the next chapter, linked to Paul's cultural setting, and highlighted in a way that shows why they were effective. I will then repeat the exercise with Paul's apologetics and Postmodernism in Chapter Six. What I simply want to know at this juncture is whether we should even bother to explore such things in the first place.

One clue to the answer is found in the verse that follows 1 Thess. 1:5. In it, Paul compliments the Thessalonian believers for mimicking him and the evangelistic approach he took with them: “You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything” (1 Thess. 1:6–8). In these several verses, Paul appears to be giving a blessing to the fact that his audience was following his example (e.g. preaching the word).

Other evidence from Scripture speaks to the fact that it was customary for Paul to exhort believers to copy him: “For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me” (1 Cor. 4:15–16); “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you” (1 Cor. 11:1–2).

It may be true that Paul urged his first century audience to follow his example, but what about us today? If we apply the criteria of Goldsworthy, Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard to the question, the answer appears to be, yes, we should transfer Paul’s framework into our current era and make use of it. The historic context of the Biblical passages covered revolved around Paul’s missionary activities, something that most certainly continues today. Paul’s framework for these situations, as previously stated, consisted of three components: his message, his association with the Holy Spirit, and his personal character. Regarding his message, there is no evidence in the Bible to indicate that non-Christians can become believers today without hearing the proclamation of the gospel via the spoken or written word. Paul asks a number of rhetorical questions in Romans that spell out the fact that people need to encounter the message in order to understand the gospel: “How then will they

call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). Paul also urged his protégée to make sure he did not neglect the message aspect of his framework: "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (2 Tim. 4:1-2). It is difficult to imagine the same would not be required of today's apologists, and there is no biblical evidence supporting a contrary position.

What of the Holy Spirit? As was noted earlier in the brief look at Gal. 2:2-3, unbelievers hear the message and are "begun" by the Spirit. There is no evidence in Paul's writings or elsewhere that would indicate this is not the case today. In fact, Paul says this to his readers of his Roman letter: "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him" (Rom. 8:9). More evidence will be presented in the next chapter as to exactly why the Holy Spirit is a requirement for today and what obstacles He overcomes in a non-Christian to produce faith, but two passages in Paul's writings will be highlighted now. The first is contained within Romans 8: "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so" (Romans 8:6-7). Here, Paul is describing the state of the unbeliever who possesses an inability ('not even able to do so') that is only removed by the Spirit's actions in regeneration. This is confirmed elsewhere in Paul's writings, most notably in his first letter to the Corinthians where he says, "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." (1 Corinthians 2:14). Given there is no biblical evidence to support a claim that unbelievers today possess a different spiritual constitution prior to

regeneration, it would seem reasonable to conclude that the this part of Paul's template/model (the Holy Spirit) is applicable for modern day apologetic work.

Lastly, as to Paul's character and whether it should be utilized today, empirical evidence will be presented in Chapter Five that shows the number one complaint modern day unbelievers have against the Christian community is that their character does not match the gospel message. Therefore, this being true, mimicking Paul's loving character toward unbelievers and living an exemplary life among them in the contemporary culture may be one of the strongest and most potent apologetics that modern day evangelists can deploy. In other words, to include it in today's model from the Pauline apologetic template seems both reasonable and compelling.

### **3.6.3 Conclusion**

The answer as to whether Paul's apologetic framework as noted in 1 Thess. 1:5 should be applied to today and used by modern day apologists appears to be yes. The *tria martus* system employed by Paul appears to not only be relevant, but necessary to make believers in the current era. Affirming this fact, one of the members of the "New Perspectives on Paul" movement, N. T. Wright, makes the following comment regarding Paul, his gospel message, and Postmodernism:

"I have not attempted to address the question of what Paul would say to post-modernity; but I think that there, too, Paul would help us to face the challenge with a robust Christian integrity very different from the frightened mutterings one hears in some quarters. Paul's view of truth, of reality, of the self, of the controlling story of the creator and the cosmos, of the covenant God and his covenant people – these can serve very well as the true and vital answer to post-modernity's attempt to deconstruct truth and reality, to destabilize and decentre the self, and to destroy all meta-narratives. I believe, in other words, that Paul's gospel . . . has the power to do for the world and the church of today what they did in Paul's own day" (Wright, 1997: 164-65).

### 3.7 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter has been to make an attempt at discovering the apologetic framework used by the Apostle Paul in the first century and validate that it is applicable for present day apologists and their evangelistic campaigns. I began by briefly addressing the New Testament One vs. Two-Paul debate and provided evidence that the One-Paul school of thought offers credible responses to the Two-Paul camp. Therefore, for the purposes of this chapter and the remainder of this thesis, my stance will be that the Paul of Acts and the Paul of the epistles are one and the same.

I then proceeded to propose that Paul's apologetic framework is nicely summarized in 1 Thess. 1:5 and validated its existence elsewhere in the book of Acts and the Pauline corpus. Lastly, I examined the question of whether the Apostle's framework that he used in the first century is applicable to the modern era and is prescriptive in nature. The conclusion was that, yes, Paul's system has genuine relevance for today.

In the next chapter I will perform a comprehensive investigation into Paul's *tria martus* system and examine each of the three components that make up the Apostle's framework in much greater detail and explain how each may have addressed the various first century socio-historical needs that were outlined in Chapter Two.

## CHAPTER 4: A DETAILED EXAMINATION OF PAUL'S APOLOGETIC FRAMEWORK

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate more deeply the apologetic framework and methodology used by the Apostle Paul, which was identified in the prior chapter. To help achieve the goal of this chapter, four specific areas are explored.

First, each part of Paul's framework will be examined using the book of Acts and then Paul's epistles. The first component of Paul's *apologia* that will be analyzed is his *message*. As covered in Chapter Three, Paul's activities as outlined by the author of Acts and Paul himself in his writings, indicate that he had a message to deliver on behalf of Christ who commissioned him on the Damascus road. The main question now before us is this: What did Paul's proclamation of the gospel and defense of its underlying truth before both Jewish and Gentile audiences entail? Did Paul adapt his message for specific audiences and if so, what did the Apostle add or exclude? To answer these questions the speeches of Paul found in Acts will be investigated as the primary source material because they contain the most information about Paul's interactions with unbelievers, and then a look to the Pauline corpus for supporting validation of those findings will be performed.

After this analysis, the next area of examination will be the *method* of Paul. In this section a shift in focus will be done from the "what" of Paul's *apologia* to the "how". How did Paul deliver his message and what part did this 'how' play in his overall framework? Because Paul consistently dealt with unbelievers, an analysis will be performed on Paul's anthropology and specifically his view of the noetic effects of sin, which speaks to the condition in which he believed he would find his converts. Additionally, the position that Paul and the author of Acts took on the Holy Spirit's role in the conversion of the believer, the accounts of the Apostle's use of miracles, the reliance (if any) he had on his

educational training in rhetoric, and any miscellaneous techniques that can be uncovered will also be explored.

The third component of the Apostle's apologetic framework that will be examined is his *manner*. Before his Damascus road conversion, Saul of Tarsus was a zealous persecutor of the Nazarene sect and exhibited a personality that was in keeping with the violence he carried out against the Church of God. But after his apprehension by Christ, what changes took place in Paul's manner and affections and how did they affect his evangelistic efforts?

Finally, a summary review of the most common, contemporary apologetic systems is performed. These systems will then be compared to Paul's to see if the Apostle's framework fits into an existing apologetic category or whether it is unique.

So the aim of this chapter, therefore, is to gain more information about Paul's apologetic system using the New Testament book of Acts and the Pauline corpus and bring it together in a systematic fashion. I will also look at how his framework may have been molded by the historic background and the significance it might have had in his cultural setting. Let's start by briefly reviewing what was found in Chapter Three and then move on to expand each part of Paul's framework in much greater detail.

## **4.2 AN OVERVIEW OF PAUL'S APOLOGETICS**

In Chapter Three, we discovered that Paul's *apologia* exhibited itself in a three-fold approach. The Apostle's *apologia* is succinctly summed up in 1 Thess. 1:5, which says: "for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake." In this verse, I find three distinct witnesses to the gospel that Paul was proclaiming: (1) A message or 'word'; (2) The Holy Spirit Who was present in Paul's evangelistic encounters,

and produced power, miracles, and conviction alongside Paul's message; (3) A personal witness and character in the life of the Apostle that was unmistakable, attractive, and acted as a testifier to the truth of Paul's message. I will label each apologetic witness as: the *message* of Paul, the *method* of Paul, and the *manner* of Paul.

In this chapter, I will see if there is enough evidence to show that these three witnesses all worked together in a holistic fashion to comprise an apologetic system that the Apostle utilized effectively throughout his ministry. However, I will be careful to define exactly what "effective" and "successful" mean when examining the end results of Paul's apologetic efforts because, as will be shown in a subsequent chapter, the application of Paul's apologetic system oftentimes produced violent persecution, opposition, and frustration – things not normally associated with triumphant evangelistic missions.

With this brief review out of the way, let's now look more deeply at the first part of Paul's *tria martus* apologetics – his message.

### **4.3 THE MESSAGE OF PAUL**

Theologians have often commented down through the years: "Is it not odd that God would put the salvation of men and women's souls in our mouths?" But Paul indicates in Romans this is part of God's plan for salvation:

"For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for 'Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!' However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?' So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:12-17).

If, as Paul says, faith comes from hearing, then it would seem logical that the most obvious place to start with our effort in detailing Paul's apologetic framework is with the Apostle's message itself. I begin first with a cursory examination of the book of Acts and the Pauline corpus to answer the question: when Paul was given the opportunity to either proclaim or defend the Christian message, what did he actually say?

#### **4.3.1 The Message of Paul as found in Acts**

The investigation of Paul's message in the book of Acts will be approached in the following manner: I will first locate sections in the book that contain meaningful evangelistic or apologetic dialogues between Paul and one or more individuals, with 'meaningful' for our purposes being defined as enough information being present to extract data that allows us to determine what subjects or topics Paul was presenting to persuade his audience of the truthfulness of his gospel message. After this has been ascertained, I will attempt to ferret out the subject matters and themes of each speech so we can understand what Paul communicated to his listeners. This will allow us to see what general conclusions about Paul's message can be drawn from his speeches. I will then attempt to establish the cultural backgrounds of the individuals being spoken to by Paul, with the goal of obtaining this information being to determine if Paul altered his message presentation based on the ethnicity of his audience. Lastly, I will locate in Acts other descriptions of what its author listed as Paul saying to various audiences that may be of help to my investigation.

While I touched on the One- vs. Two-Paul debate and the approach I am taking in regard to the historicity of Acts in Chapter Three (cf. 3.2), a mention here is warranted on the general debate surrounding the trustworthiness of Paul's speeches that are found in Acts. Those believing the accounts are more fiction than fact claim that the speeches are all of the same general style, that the theology of the speeches is more Lukan than Pauline, and therefore the author

has followed the Thucydidean model and put on the lips of Paul the opinions that he felt were appropriate for the occasion (Carson, Moo, Morris, 1992: 209). Summing up this position is Dibelius who writes, "These speeches, without doubt, are as they stand inventions of the author. For they are too short to have been actually given in this form; they are too similar to one another to have come from different persons; and in their content they occasionally reproduce a later standpoint" (Dibelius, 1936: 262).

A couple of responses to the above charges are necessary. First, Thucydides admits that only when he did not have information at hand did he not report what was actually said. Second, an exhibited uniformity in the speeches may only mean that the author paraphrased the orations rather than reporting each speech verbatim. Further, perhaps the author shortened the account by omitting insignificant information or condensing a discourse for the sake of brevity, while not losing the thrust of the discourse's argument. On this point, Hope and Moulton say:

"Of course Luke is usually credited with Paul's Areopagitica, and it may be difficult to prove completely that he wrote his report from full notes, given him not long after by his master. But when we find the Lukan Paul quoting Epimenides (Acts xvii, 28a) and the Paul of the Pastorals citing the very same context (Tit. i, 12), with the Aratus-Cleanthes quotation (ib., 28b) to match the Menander (1 Cor. xv, 33), we may at least remark that the speech is very subtly concocted. Paul was, moreover, much more likely than Luke to know the tenets of Stoics and Epicureans so as to make such delicately suited allusions to them. Luke's knowledge of Greek literature does not seem to have gone far beyond the medical writers who so profoundly influenced his diction" (Hope, Moulton, 2000: 8).

Third, Carson argues that in no case can it be shown that the theology or sentiments expressed in the speeches are inappropriate for the occasion or out of character for the speaker (Carson, Moo, Morris, 1992: 210). This is also agreed to by Bruce who states: "Taken all in all, each speech suits the speaker, the audience, and the circumstances of delivery; and this, along with the other points we have considered, gives good ground, in my judgment, for believing these speeches to be, not inventions of the historian, but condensed accounts of

speeches actually made, and therefore valuable and independent sources for the history and theology of the primitive Church” (Bruce, 1942). Thirty years after making this statement, Bruce produced an update to his original paper on the speeches in Acts where he acknowledges making room for other’s opinions on Pauline and other discourses in Acts, however he still says, “I have not renounced this understanding [that Acts is a historical document in the tradition of Thucydides and Polybius] of the book” (Bruce, 1972). For my purposes, I am interested in extracting the specific subjects that are covered in Acts’ Pauline speeches. For that purpose, I am content that the arguments above allow me to do so with acceptable confidence where the accuracy of the accounts are concerned.

When Paul’s various addresses are approached in a matter where the subjects are extracted from the Pauline speech passages in Acts chapters 13, 14, 17, 22, 24, 26, and 28 using a combination of reading the text with Lukasweski and Dubis’ Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament Sentence Analysis (via Logos 4.0 software), and the results categorized, I arrived at eleven different topics selected by the Apostle (and/or the author of Acts). Although there are certainly other subjects or ideas mentioned by Paul in these speeches, I restricted the following table to the prominent subjects that played a direct role in his attempt to establish the truth claims of Christianity or convey the requirements of the Christian faith to an unbeliever. Using this criterion, I offer the table below as a summary of the various subjects/themes, the chapters in which each appears, and the total mentions of that particular subject/theme in each of the seven Pauline discourses:

<b>Chapter/Subject or Theme</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>Total Mentions</b>
<b>Total verses in speech form</b>	26	3	10	20	12	26	5	<b>102</b>
<b>Historical events</b>	18		2	16	4	14	3	<b>57</b>
<b>God</b>	16	1	9	2	3	5	1	<b>37</b>

<b>Jesus (his life, death, etc.)</b>	14		1	8		3	1	<b>27</b>
<b>Scriptures</b>	10			2	1	2	1	<b>16</b>
<b>Resurrection</b>	6		1	1	2	2		<b>12</b>
<b>Election/Sovereignty</b>	5	1	2					<b>8</b>
<b>Repentance</b>	1	1	1			2		<b>5</b>
<b>Judgment</b>	1		1		2			<b>4</b>
<b>Creation</b>		2	1					<b>3</b>
<b>Faith</b>	1			1		1		<b>3</b>
<b>Forgiveness</b>	1					1		<b>2</b>
<b>Baptism</b>				1				<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>175</b>

Table 1: Presentation of topics in the Pauline speeches found in Acts.

Evaluating the same subjects and themes, but now with an eye towards the audience mix in which the various topics were communicated yields the following result:

<b>Chapter/Subject or Theme</b>	<b>Primarily Jewish (13,22,28)</b>	<b>Primarily Gentile (14,17)</b>	<b>Mixture of Jew/Gentile (24,26)</b>	<b>Total Mentions</b>
<b>Historical events</b>	37	2	18	<b>57</b>
<b>God</b>	19	10	8	<b>37</b>
<b>Jesus</b>	23	1	3	<b>27</b>
<b>Scriptures</b>	13	0	3	<b>16</b>
<b>Resurrection</b>	7	1	4	<b>12</b>
<b>Election/Sovereignty</b>	5	3	0	<b>8</b>
<b>Repentance</b>	1	2	2	<b>5</b>
<b>Judgment</b>	1	1	2	<b>4</b>

<b>Creation</b>	0	3	0	<b>3</b>
<b>Faith</b>	2	0	1	<b>3</b>
<b>Forgiveness</b>	1	0	1	<b>2</b>
<b>Baptism</b>	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>175</b>

Table 2: Presentation of topics in the Pauline speeches found in Acts by the ethnicity of the audience present.

Some conclusions that may be drawn from the above data with respect to Paul's apologetic message include the following:

- It can be argued that Paul clearly altered the subject matter of his message, and the initial source material of his apologetic, according to the cultural background of the listeners he was addressing. Of this, Bruce simply says: "The preaching of the Gospel to pagans naturally required a different technique from preaching it to Jews and 'God-fearers'" (Bruce, 1942).
- Appeals to historical events comprise the largest single running theme of Paul's speeches - 33% of topics mentioned include a historical reference. However, it should be noted that historical events are almost entirely utilized when Jews were present in the audience; 96% of historical references were made to either primarily Jewish audiences or a mixture of Jews and Gentiles.
- The person of God is the second most mentioned topic to Jew and Jew-Gentile gatherings and the number one subject mentioned to Gentile audiences.
- Explicit mentions of Jesus come mostly to Jewish crowds. As can be seen, 85% of the time Jesus of Nazareth is spoken about, it is to the Jews. However, He is only omitted in the speeches of chapter 14 (very short) and 24, which is Paul's defense before Felix.

- The Old Testament Scriptures are not explicitly referred to a single time when the audience before Paul was primarily comprised of Gentiles and employed very infrequently when Gentiles were present with Jews in the crowd. Paul appears to substitute quotations from pagan literature when dealing with non-Jews in place of the Scriptural quotations he used with his Jewish audiences.
- Paul appeals to the witness of the natural world – creation – as an apologetic for God only in the case of his Gentile audiences.
- The concept of bodily resurrection, although something that was disbelieved by non-Jewish peoples, was not omitted in Paul’s address to Gentile listeners. Nearly half the mentions of resurrection came to primarily Gentile or Gentile/Jew audiences.
- The need for repentance is made to all audiences as is the reality of a coming judgment.
- The small number of subjects mentioned to the primarily Gentile audiences should be understood as due to the extreme brevity of Paul’s words spoken in Acts 14 (only three verses).

Also noteworthy are the following key observations from the seven Pauline discourses regarding the message that was delivered:

- In no case does Paul utilize an explicitly theistic proof for the existence of God (e.g. cosmological: horizontal/vertical, teleological, moral, etc.), but rather God’s existence is presupposed and simply stated. In his epistles, Paul implicitly alludes to the concept of such proofs such as the horizontal cosmological argument (“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes. . . have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made” – Rom. 1:19-20; “all things originate from God” – 1 Cor. 11:12; “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things” – Rom. 11:36; see Col. 1:16 also), vertical cosmological argument (“in Him all things hold together” – Col. 1:17), and moral argument (Rom. 2:12-15) in his epistles, but he does not present a logical proof of

his end conclusion anywhere in Acts. A possible reason for the lack of such proofs in the content of Paul's messages may be explained in the writing of Thomas Aquinas:

“As the other sciences do not argue in proof of their principles, but argue from their principles to demonstrate other truths in these sciences, so this doctrine [the Sacred Doctrine] does not argue in proof of its principles, which are the articles of faith, but from them it goes on to prove something else; as the Apostle argues from the resurrection of Christ in proof of the general resurrection (1 Cor. XV, 12)” (Aquinas, 1999: 19).

Another possible reason may have been a lack in Paul's culture of what is today considered atheism.

- The threat of judgment would have especially caused Paul's Gentile listeners upon the Hill of Ares (or Mars Hill – Mars, who was the Roman god of war) to bristle as neither the Epicureans nor the Stoics believed in such a thing. A motto written by Diogenes (an Epicurean) in about A.D. 200 sums up their belief system: “Nothing to fear in God; Nothing to feel in death, Good [pleasure] can be attained; Evil [pain] can be endured” (Witherington, 1998: 514).
- There are no hints in any of the Pauline speeches of the message delivered being directed or applicable to only certain peoples, cultures, or other such groups, but rather the message is clearly framed to speak to all of humankind – in other words, it is universal in nature; it can be argued to be a metanarrative.

A natural next question that flows from these conclusions is, in what order did Paul arrange his subjects and topics for his listeners – was there a logical progression of presuppositions or foundational building blocks that led to a final deductive conclusion? Perhaps a more probing question that springs from the previous query is whether the Apostle had an agenda (outside of the obvious motivation of converting his prospects to the Christian faith) and purpose in the order in which the topics of his message were presented?

Addressing the question of the order and progression of subjects within Paul's message, I find a number of common patterns. To bring these configurations to the forefront, I look at the three most prominent evangelistic speeches in Acts, which are found in chapters 13, 17, and 26. In Acts 13, Paul is seen beginning with God and interjecting references to Yahweh sixteen times (vv. 16, 17, 18, 29, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 30, 33, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 41) throughout the twenty-six verse discourse. Historical citations of ancient history (as chronicled in the Scriptures) commence the speech with these leading immediately to the current history of Paul's day, which points to Jesus. Indeed the history of the past that points to the present appears to be a succinct biblically-based genealogy that leads to the promise of the Messiah, the need for repentance, and the events that occurred during His brief life. The resurrection of Jesus then becomes the center of attention for eight verses (vv. 30-37), which is followed by the mention of forgiveness of sins (vs. 38), the superiority of the New covenant over the Old (vs. 39), and lastly, the mention of judgment that awaits those who do not acknowledge the truthfulness of Paul's proclamation (vv. 40-41).

As the speech in Acts 13 concerns itself with a primarily Jewish and Gentile converts to Judaism audience, we next turn to Acts 17 to examine the pattern that emerges from Paul's address to a pagan audience that neither knew the Scriptures nor understood the God of the Bible. On Mars Hill, as he did with the Jews in the Antioch synagogue in Acts 13, Paul begins his speech with God (vv. 23-24). But, instead of using the Scriptures as his next foundation, he immediately moves to the subject of the created universe and the sovereignty with which the creator God acts over the works of His hands (vv. 24, 26). Paul finishes his discourse with reversing the concluding order in Acts 13 by speaking about the promise of a coming judgment and the resurrection of Christ (vs. 31), with the mention of Jesus being placed between the two (although not by name).

Excluding the speech in Acts 14 primarily because of its extreme brevity, Acts 22 and 24 for the reason that they are primarily more of a defense of Paul

himself (and his legal entanglements with Rome) and are devoid of any weighty evangelistic/apologetic appeal, and Acts 28 because it does not contain the actual dialog between Paul and his Roman audience, we now turn to the Pauline discourse found in Acts 26. This speech had as its audience both Jews and pagan Gentiles (somewhat of a combination of the audience in Acts 13 and 17) and contains an ending proclamation of the gospel. Paul begins by referring to past personal historical events and then mentions God and promises made by God in ancient history, which are found in the written Scriptures (vv. 4-7). Somewhat abruptly, the subject of resurrection is brought up (vs. 8), and then Paul moves to immediate history that concerns Jesus (vv. 9-11). Immediately afterwards, the Apostle conveys his personal conversion testimony that occurred on the road to Damascus and mentions the topic of forgiveness (vv. 12-18). This is followed by the subject of repentance (vv. 19-20) and additional references to the promises God made in the Scriptures concerning the Messiah (vs. 22). Paul ends his initial discourse in the presence of Agrippa with the mention of the resurrection (vs. 23) and excludes any reference to judgment.

The general, common pattern that appears to emerge from these three key evangelistic/apologetic addresses from Paul yields insight into the agenda or purpose of the Apostle's message, which was to move his audience to trust truths that they could not see from supplied evidences that they already trusted and/or could currently see. In other words, Paul's message was constructed so as to convince the unbeliever of the unseen via proofs of the seen or facts that they already embraced (e.g. the Old Testament Scriptures with his Jewish audience), with the largest single new historical data point provided in each message being the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The resurrection emerges as the key event that blends both the natural (historically verifiable in Paul's day) and the supernatural (a miracle) and thus was used by Paul as the capstone of his argument in his attempt to persuade his listeners of the truth of the supernatural gospel message he preached.

Finally, concerning what the Book of Acts records as Paul having said to his various audiences outside of the seven speeches already analyzed, we find the following:

- "and immediately he [Paul] began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God'" (Acts 9:20).
- "But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ." (Acts 9:22).
- "They [Paul and Silas] said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household'" (Acts 16:31).
- "And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ'" (Acts 17:2-3).
- "Now these [the Bereans] were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word [from Paul] with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).
- "But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18:5).
- "You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all" (Acts 19:26).
- "how I [Paul] did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20-21).
- "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. And now,

behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face" (Acts 20:24-25).

- "But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, 'Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!'" (Acts 23:6).
- "But as he [Paul] was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, 'Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you'" (Acts 24:25).
- "'When the accusers stood up, they began bringing charges against him [Paul] not of such crimes as I was expecting, but they simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive" (Acts 25:18-19).
- "And he [Paul] stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered" (Acts 28:30-31).

In these brief descriptions of the message Paul communicated, I find many of the same subjects and themes from the seven Pauline speeches in Acts, many mentions of Jesus, a few new topics coming to light (e.g. righteousness, self-control), but nothing that challenges the previous observations made regarding the key Pauline speeches in Acts. From the above it can be seen that the focus of Paul's message was that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ, the Lord whose kingdom Paul was proclaiming, and a kingdom that speaks of righteousness, self-control and judgment. Equally central to the message is that Jesus rose from the dead as a fulfillment of the Scriptures, and that there is no other God but one Who is a God of grace.

I now briefly turn to the writings in the Pauline corpus to determine if the concluding results derived from the information assembled together from

Paul's recorded activities in the book of Acts can be validated by Paul's own hand.

#### **4.3.2 A Brief Look at the Message of Paul as found in his Epistles**

It should first be noted that room does not permit an exhaustive examination of Paul's large body of work. However, such a lengthy analysis I believe to be superfluous; a cursory reading of the Pauline corpus will prove that it is awash in the subjects and topics listed in the previous section that concentrated on the Apostle's speeches in Acts. This being the case, I will restrict my investigation to a few meaningful sections in the epistles where Paul mentions a summary of "the gospel" that help to either endorse or discard the conclusions drawn from the information discovered in Acts.

One of the most important descriptions of Paul's gospel is found in 1 Cor. 15 where he also describes his message in more detail. The Apostle explains his proclamation in 1 Cor. 15:1-8 as the following:

"Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also."

Unlike the rest of 1 Corinthians, chapter 15 is devoted mostly to doctrine. It contains one of the earliest creeds to be found in Scripture and what Habermas calls the single most important, pre-Pauline creed in all the New Testament (Habermas, 1996: 144). A number of key non-Pauline words/phrases in the passage appear to confirm this (as a pre-Pauline creed): (1) "for our sins"; (2)

“according to the scriptures”; (3) “he was raised”; (4) “third day”; (5) “he was seen”; (6) “the twelve” (Habermas, 1996: 153).

Paul begins by saying he is making “known” something to the Corinthians – γνωρίζω, which was used to introduce a solemn statement (Rogers, 1998: 384).

He then calls the Corinthians ἀδελφοί, literally, males from the same womb (cf. 1:10; 2:1; 3:1; 10:1; etc.; Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, 2000), which is an assurance conveyed by the Apostle to his readers that they are indeed fellow Christians. The term not only expresses his spiritual identity with them but also his love (cf. 15:58).

Next, Paul tells them that he is reiterating the gospel (cf. Acts 14:7, 21; 16:10; 20:24) that he preached, which is the same term Paul used in 1 Thess. 1:5 for what he brought to the Thessalonian believers. Not until verses 3-4 does he specify what the message portion of the gospel actually contained. Paul states to his audience that he “delivered” what he had “received”, which are technical terms that rabbis used for passing on tradition (Habermas, 1996: 153). Paul is basically saying that the content of his message was not his own, but that he received it from another source. Perhaps Paul was patterning his apologetic message after someone or something else?

Paul says the things that he is about to speak of are πρώτοις, first in the gospel message; not to time but in importance. He then states four items, which are presented by four verbs: died (ἀπέθανεν), was buried (ἐτάφη), was raised (ἐγήγερται), and appeared (ὤφθη). All are historical facts that link back to the subject items conveyed in the Pauline speeches that we covered in the prior section (cf. 4.3.1). The phrase “for our sins” (ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν - over, in behalf, even instead of (cf. Gal. 3:13), where used of persons) indicates the subject matter of forgiveness, something also covered in the Acts speeches.

Twice Paul says that these historical events took place “according to the Scriptures”. What Scriptures he is referring to cannot explicitly be surmised from the passage (perhaps Gen. 22:8; Ps. 16:10; Ps. 22; Isa. 53:8-10). Wright argues that Paul was not referring to a handful of proof-texts or isolated events in Scripture, but rather that the Apostle was stating he saw the entire Biblical narrative moving toward the truths he was outlining (Wright, 1997: 50).

In Paul’s writings there are some ninety references to Old Testament passages (Carson, Moo, Morris, 1992: 222), and in the prior section that covered Paul’s message in Acts, we saw that Paul consistently reasoned with his audience and made use of the Scriptures (e.g. Acts 17:2, 11). During his address to King Agrippa (cf. Acts 26), we saw that Paul also used the Scriptures as an anchor point with the king and basically spoke the same message then that he refers to in 1 Cor. 15:3-4.

When addressing the topic of Christ’s resurrection and the historical fact that Jesus was “raised”, the Apostle switches to the perfect passive indicative; likely a deliberate move on Paul’s part to emphasize the permanence of the resurrection of Jesus. Four times Paul says that Jesus appeared to various individuals or groups, and starts with Christ’s appearance to Peter. The term used is the first aorist passive indicative of the defective verb ὁράω “to see”, which helps confirm the fact that what Peter saw was not simply a vision, but a true physical appearance.

So in conclusion, we find that the topics Paul references in this passage are (1) Jesus Christ; (2) the forgiveness of sins; (3) Christ’s death; (4) the Scriptures, specifically the historical prophecies concerning Christ; (5) Christ’s burial; (6) Christ’s resurrection; and (7) an appeal to recent history: Christ’s appearances to both believers and unbelievers (his half-brother James). Thus we find most of the subjects listed in this short set of verses that correspond to Paul’s evangelistic speeches in Acts. Pressing further into the chapter yields more of the subjects spoken of by Paul in Acts (e.g. the person of God).

A brief passage that mirrors the information found in 1 Cor. 15 is the introduction contained in Paul's letter to the Romans, which says:

"Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake" (Rom. 1:1-5).

Here, Paul gives another shorthand summary of the gospel message. It is something that was promised through the 'holy Scriptures', which is a term only used here in the New Testament. As was mentioned in the examination of 1 Cor. 15, data gathered from Acts showed that Paul routinely used the Scriptures to argue his point concerning Jesus being the Messiah. Paul then goes on to reference the historical birth of and cites a reference to Jesus' royal earthly family tree, with perhaps an allusion being made to the Scripture's statements concerning David and the Messiah (cf. 2 Sam. 7). Paul is in essence saying the messianic promises of salvation have come true in Jesus, and the major proof point declaring this to be the case and evidencing that Jesus is the Son of God is the historically verifiable resurrection of Him from the dead. The resurrection is a focus here in this passage as it was in 1 Cor. 15, and was consistently mentioned in the Pauline speeches in Acts.

There are other examples that can be found in the Pauline corpus that correspond to the information delivered in the Acts' speeches. The fourth and sixth chapter of Romans deals with many of the same topics (Christ's delivery over to the cross for our forgiveness and His resurrection) as does the third chapter of Galatians and the second chapter of Colossians. With these confirmations, there appears to be enough evidence present to make an argument that we have established validation that the recordings of what Paul spoke in Acts correspond to what the Apostle declared in his own writings.

With an understanding of Paul's message – the things he actually said – being now complete, I next move on to identify any key presuppositions that supported his message. What things, if any, did the Apostle presuppose with his audiences during his addresses?

### **4.3.3 The Presuppositions of Paul's Message**

When examining the 'what' of Paul's apologetic defenses and evangelistic appeals, we next need to look at what things he assumed his listeners understood and/or believed they were equipped with so as to properly process the message that he delivered. In analyzing the seven Pauline discourses in Acts as well as the material in the Pauline corpus, I observe at least ten basic presuppositions that supported Paul's message.

First, I find the concept of truth underneath the Pauline proclamation. It is a form of truth that can be defined as that which matches reality and that which applies in an absolute and universal sense to all peoples for all times in all places (see argument below in the sixth presupposition for support of this last characteristic). When, during his apologetic defense before King Agrippa, Paul was accused by Festus as suffering from a cognitive dysfunction, Paul replied: "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of *sober truth*" (Acts 26:25, emphasis added). Paul believed that the message he delivered was based on the absolute truth of God since the God of truth had revealed it to him. Within Paul's epistles we find the concept of ἀλήθεια referred to 48 times in 45 different verses, with Paul providing a foundation for Aquinas who said "the contrary of a truth can never be demonstrated" (Aquinas, 1999: 19). Carson has documented 19 instances in the Pauline epistles where the Apostle states that a person can know something with certainty (Carson, 2005: 197-98) so Paul evidently held to a stance where humanity could reach a state of actual confidence about various matters. This being the case, the evangelist following Paul must understand that the tactic humankind takes toward the truth – since

a truth cannot be proven false – is to suppress it (Rom. 1:18). Nonetheless, the apologist’s job according to Paul is to present the truth regardless of the reception it receives and the distance it may produce between the evangelist and his/her audience. For example, Paul, after chastising the Galatians for attempting to mix faith and the Law and then explaining the truth of faith in detail to them, asked the church: "So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16). The Apostle did indeed believe and state that certain beliefs were untrue, that certain practices were wrong and not how God had intended people to live and function.

The second presupposition of Paul’s message is that his listeners were logical beings who could understand rational arguments. Paul comes across as believing that God may be prior to logic in an ontological fashion, but that logic for man is prior to God in an epistemic sense. Whether Jew or Gentile, logical first principles are found within Paul’s message: the laws of identity (e.g. 2 Cor. 11:4), non-contradiction (e.g. 1 Cor. 10:21), excluded middle (e.g. 1 Cor. 8:5-6), and rational inference (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:16-17) are all present in some manner and utilized to make his case for the gospel. This concept of reason and use of logic will be explored in greater detail in the upcoming section on Paul’s second apologetic witness, which is his method.

The third assumption underlying Paul’s message is that language itself is understandable and perfectly capable of serving as a vehicle for the communication of truth and meaning. The Apostle states to the Corinthians: "There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning" (1 Cor. 14:10). We find Paul employing different languages on occasion to communicate the same meaningful “God message” that was relayed to other audiences in a different dialect (e.g. "And when they heard that he was addressing them in the *Hebrew dialect*, they became even more quiet" – Acts 22:2, emphasis added). Confirming this presupposition, we never find any of Paul’s audiences confused or arguing over Paul’s use of language. They may have not agreed with his message, but such disagreement is another indicator

that they understood its meaning in the language with which it was presented (cf. Acts 26:22).

The fourth presupposition pivots off of the third. It is that objective meaning can be found within the written text (language) of Scripture. As I will discuss in more detail later, this is not to say that cultural context has no bearing on the interpretation of the text. Quite the contrary – it is absolutely necessary to understand the cultural and historical setting to glean the best interpretation possible. That said, Paul indicates that the reader is not the determiner of the Bible's textual meaning, but the writer (in Paul's mind, the Holy Spirit working through Scripture's authors - 2 Tim 3:16) is. If this is true, then the readers' job is to acknowledge and subject themselves to the meaning contained within the Word of God. This is especially seen in Acts 13 where the events communicated by Paul from Scripture to his mostly Jewish audience are meant to be understood and assented to by each and every person present. Further, it seems that, for Paul, the text is intrinsically capable of conveying truth about objective reality (cf. Rom. 10:8-10).

The fifth supposition is built upon the fourth and third, which is that history is knowable and that the Christian faith is inseparably tied to historical events that have been both accurately recorded and preserved in the Scriptures. Moreover, Paul expresses strong value for the past and teaches that history serves as a tutor for those currently living (1 Cor. 10:11). References to historical events are found throughout the Pauline speeches, with Acts 13 standing out among the rest as a prime example. The importance of history is also found throughout Paul's writings with the knowability and historicity of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12-19) being a strong illustration.

The sixth presupposition Paul makes about the audiences he addressed is that his message applied to everyone who was in attendance regardless of their race, cultural heritage, existing religion, or any other circumstantial factor. In his Mars Hill address, Paul makes the statement, "Therefore having overlooked the

times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that *all people everywhere* should repent" (Acts 17:30, emphasis added). From this it can be argued that Paul believed in a metanarrative that applied globally to all of humankind, and that the message he was proclaiming should be understood in that fashion.

The seventh presupposition of Paul's message is that God exists. The Apostle never makes an explicit argument for the existence of God, but instead simply proclaims God's existence and expects his audience – whether Jews who already acknowledge Yahweh or Gentiles who need to be educated about who He is – to acquiesce to this truth. Atheism is not an opponent that Paul appears to directly confront in any of his speeches, but idolatry – the worship of false deities – certainly is (cf. 1 Cor. 8). It might be argued that Paul may have implicitly supplied proofs for God's existence such as his statement in Lystra: "and yet He *did not leave Himself without witness*, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17, emphasis added). But, such statements are very subdued when compared to the arguments made today by classical apologists. However, it should be kept in mind that atheism as it boldly presents itself today did not exist in Paul's culture (unless one considers Epicurean materialism).

The eighth assumption Paul makes is that God has revealed Himself to humankind with the Apostle affirming that God's revelation has been spoken to humankind in two different ways. First, Paul says there is a language spoken in creation. Responding to rhetorical arguments about humankind not having heard about God, Paul quotes Psalm 19 in Romans: "But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; 'Their voice has gone out into all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world'" (Rom. 10:18; cf. Rom. 1:18-25). This revelation is used by Paul as his primary apologetic for Gentile audiences, which has already been discussed in this chapter. Second is God's revelation found in the Scriptures, which Paul uses primarily with his Jewish listeners

who accept the truth that God has revealed Himself through the writing of His prophets.

The ninth presupposition of Paul is that miracles are possible. The concept of miracles and their contribution to Paul's overall framework will be explored in greater depth in the section that follows on Paul's method, but for now, we note that Paul spoke freely about the supernatural intervention of God in His creation, with the most obvious (and most conveyed) miracle being the resurrection of Christ from the dead. So dependent is Christianity on this supernatural precondition, and on this one miracle from God in particular, that Paul writes in 1 Cor. 15:14-18 that the faith would collapse without it (e.g. "and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins." - 1 Cor. 15:17).

The tenth and last presupposition undergirding Paul's message is the concept of exclusivity. Religious relativism, inclusivism, and pluralism are all rejected in the Pauline speeches in Acts and Paul's epistles. One example of this is 1 Cor. 8:4-7 where Paul argues there is no other God but the God of Scripture. He does note that all people do not have this knowledge yet, however.

With an examination of the various presuppositions of Paul's message now complete, let us now take a closer look at the significance of that message in light of the society and culture in which the Apostle lived.

#### **4.3.4 Paul's Message in His Culture and Society**

Paul's message, shaped by his Jewish heritage, was delivered to both Jews and Gentiles in the first century. In this section, I want to look at some of the cultural and societal significances that the Apostle's message may have had for those living during that time. I will first cover some of the general characteristics of Paul's message and its possible impact upon his audience and

then look at some of the key traits of his message that may have resonated with his hearers in some respects, while challenging them in others.

Some scholars attribute much of Christianity's success to the social and psychological benefits that it offered its adherents during the first century – benefits that were not found in either the cults or competing philosophies (Tripolitis, 2002: 116). One key attribute of Paul's message that may have psychologically appealed to the first century mind was its openness. Paul's metanarrative included everyone and was open to all without any restrictions, other than a requirement of steadfast devotion to Christ and a high moral/ethical conduct. By contrast, the mystery cults tended to be secretive, exclusive (e.g. Mithraism and its attitude towards women), and financially expensive. However, this factor of openness was not always received well by Paul's Jewish audience. One only needs to look at the reaction of the Jerusalem Jews in Acts 22 for an example of this.

But for the Gentiles, this aspect would be greatly appealing given the feelings of insecurity and desire for *soteria*, which permeated the culture at that time (cf. Chapter Two, 2.2.1). Paul's message should have provided confidence for his society in a number of ways. For example, Paul offered his hearers a story in which the whole world was actually going somewhere. Against the essentially non-historical worldview of paganism, Paul articulated a linear view of history, from God's initial creation to a coming new creation: a creation in which everyone could play a part. This offered the pagan world a historical map and a feeling of inclusion. For those feeling alienation and insecurity from the culture's growing cosmopolitanism (cf. Chapter 2, 2.2.1), this should have been a comforting and supportive message.

The intransigence of Paul's message may have been another important factor in Christianity's rise. While Paul's gospel excluded no one, it did have an uncompromising stance in matters of worship and behavior, which may have been viewed as a strength in the first century mind. While the various

philosophies and cults exhibited fluidity, Paul's message was different in that it demonstrated a concentrated and cohesive force.

Force was something the Apostle's message had, with the direction of Paul's message being a confrontation with paganism. Paul's education in rhetoric, which should have been used in these situations, is clearly seen in a number of his seven speeches in Acts. For example, Paul's Acts 17 message is constructed in forensic fashion, with the Apostle presenting arguments of defense to convince his audience of his concept of God, humankind, the need for salvation, resurrection, and judgment. Witherington, leaning on Zweck (1989) argues that Paul appears to follow the basic rhetorical pattern of first establishing an *ethos*, then offering his *logos*, and concluding with a *pathos*. The speech may be divided up as vv. 22-23 being the *exordium* including *capatio benevolentiae*; versus 23b being the *propositio*; vv. 24-29 being *probatio*; and finally vv. 30-31 being *peroratio* (Witherington, 1998: 518).

On one hand, Paul had good news for the Gentiles: they were wild olive branches being grafted in among the natural branches and would enjoy all the benefits of inclusion (cf. Rom. 11). But on the other hand, Paul's message undermined their worldview and replaced it with an essentially Jewish one, reworked around Jesus the Messiah. Paul's *apologia* to them remained Jewish. It was not composed in a manner that provided another god to choose from, another religious practice to immerse oneself in. Perhaps the reason Paul's message offered such relevance for its non-Jewish audience was that it was Jewish; if had been anything else and/or translated into a pagan category it would have competed with them on their own ground. But by remaining what it was, Paul's message claimed the high ground of genuine creational monotheism (Wright, 1997: 79, 83).

And yet in some aspects, the Apostle's message enabled him to build cultural bridges between himself and his first century audience. Wright argues that Paul did not shout his message across a yawning cultural gap, but instead involved

himself and his message in polemical engagement in that he and it became all things to all people (Wright, 1997: 80). Regardless of the debate surrounding the historicity of the Areopagus speech in Acts 17, the discourse exemplifies the principle Paul enunciated in 2 Cor. 10:5 of taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. It would seem the Apostle had no fear of taking over and using key concepts from opposing systems of thought in his message. But his message would both support certain aspects of their worldview and challenge them in other key areas.

To the Stoic (cf. Chapter Two, 2.2.2.1), Paul's message would affirm that the world is a place where God's power and magnificence are on display. But the Apostle would ask them to consider the fact that the Creator God is separate from his creation in the same way that a sculptor is distinct from his sculpture and not a part of it. To the Epicurean (cf. Chapter Two, 2.2.2.2), Paul's message supported their desire for inner peace and acknowledged that people do indeed fear death. However, Paul's message would deny their philosophical naturalism and say that the fear of death could be overcome through the historically validated resurrection of Jesus the Nazarene from the dead, and that inner peace and tranquility are obtained via a restored relationship with God through His Messiah (cf. Eph. 2:14). To the first century skeptic (the Academician) who upheld the skeptical view that things really cannot be known, Paul would have agreed that is right and proper to be skeptical about the claims made about the gods of the pagan pantheon. Paul's message would support the assertion that claimed a person cannot know about much them for the reason that they either are not real or demons in disguise (cf. 1 Cor. 1:19-21). However, he would confront them with the fact that the creation itself supplies enough evidence for the skeptic to warrant the conclusion that a Creator exists (cf. Rom. 1:19-20).

Paul's message to his audience was not a philosophy of life, but a list of historical events set within his apologetic framework, which made their significance clear. The Athenians may have not been ready to hear about Jesus

and the resurrection, but Paul gave them the message nonetheless. What has the pagan world to do with the curious events concerning Jesus of Nazareth? Paul's answer is they are not simply odd Jewish occurrences, but rather are the fulfillment of the Creator's plan for the whole world. There is good news for the Jew and non-Jew alike: the Creator of the world will be all in all and will defeat evil and death, while claiming the world as His own (Wright, 1997: 90). The first century world understood 'the gospel' to be an announcement of a king or emperor who had won a great victory or attained a throne, and this is exactly what Paul was proclaiming where Jesus was concerned.

#### 4.3.5 Summary

The first *tria martus* component of Paul's apologetic framework is the Apostle's message. While God may have used an infinite number of other means to relay His plan of salvation to His disbelieving and fallen creation, He chose the preaching of men like Paul, which is something the Apostle comments on in 1 Cor. 1:21: "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." Underlying this message were a number of presuppositions, we have no record of the core of those presuppositions being challenged in an overt way by his audience, although we certainly see examples of the truthfulness of particular ones being contested (e.g. the Mars Hill philosophers scoffing at the resurrection).

Paul's *kērygma* consisted not of theistic proofs for God; this fact is confirmed in the cursory examination we have done of Acts and of his epistles. This is something Witherington observes: "Paul does not spend a good deal of time on theology proper in his letters. This is because for Paul, Christ is part of the story of God. Soteriological and eschatological urgencies dictate in large measure the way Paul deals with the story of God" (Witherington, 1998: 237). Instead of attempting to prove the existence of a Creator, Paul was focused on using

evidence found in the 'seen' to move his audience to faith in the unseen, with the primary proof being the resurrection of Christ. Riddlebarger succinctly says:

“Paul's apologetic will be firmly grounded both in general revelation through that which God has created, and in the redemptive acts of God in Christ which are, therefore, necessarily grounded in ordinary history. When this is the goal of an evidentialist-presuppositionalist-classical apologetics debate, it ought to be greatly encouraged. . . . This means that Paul's apologetic will not be grounded in natural theology or the so-called 'classical proofs' for God's existence. Paul's apologetic will be firmly grounded both in general revelation through that which God has created, and in the redemptive acts of God in Christ which are, therefore, necessarily grounded in ordinary history. Paul was no devotee of Karl Barth's artificially imposed categories of *historische* and *Geschichte*. Since redemptive history involves the saving acts of God in time and space, redemptive history is necessarily objective history. . . .” (Riddlebarger, 1998).

The message delivered by Paul relied on historical evidences and utilized a pattern of attempting to obtain agreement on a sovereign Creator in order to lead his listeners to the truth of Christ, which is a technique endorsed by a number of theologians such as Groothuis: “Rather one may move apologetically from a generic, philosophically established monotheism to a Christian theism through the use of historical evidences” (Groothuis, 2000:156). In the end, Riddlebarger sums up Paul's message well when he says:

“Thus it seems that Paul's 'proclamation-defense' is clearly anchored in the death, burial and especially the resurrection of Jesus Christ, not in the formal proofs of classical apologetics. Neither can we view Paul's apologetic through the lens of any semi-Pelagian form of evangelical evidential apologetics which sees Christian evidences as merely additional inducements for one to make a 'decision' for Jesus. For Paul's apologetic is perfectly consistent with his theological core and, given human sinfulness and moral depravity typical of this present 'evil age,' evidential 'facts' by themselves cannot tip the scale from unbelief to faith” (Riddlebarger, 1998).

We now move to the component in Paul's apologetic framework that would act in a monergistic fashion with the Apostle's audience to do what Riddlebarger asserts cannot be done with a mere message alone - tip the scale in a non-Christian from unbelief to faith. But, we will look to see if there is also a

synergistic partnership made with Paul from God that fully completes this second part of Paul's apologetic structure.

#### **4.4 THE METHOD OF PAUL**

In 1 Thess. 1:5, Paul tells the Thessalonians that his gospel did not come to them in word only, "but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" and he is also adamant with the Corinthians that "the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power" (1 Cor. 4:20). In this section I explore the second component of Pauline apologetic framework – an element I label Paul's *method*. The role the Holy Spirit in Paul's apologetic framework will be discussed with questions such as the following being addressed: Why could the gospel not simply come to unbelievers in message only? Why was/is it necessary to have the intervention of the Holy Spirit who brings power and conviction; what part does He play and why does Paul indicate He is needed? Did Paul and the Holy Spirit work together in the Apostle's evangelistic encounters, and if so, how? I will answer these questions and elaborate further on the relationship between the power, Spirit, and conviction in Paul's *apologia* in the sections that follow.

##### **4.4.1 The Monergistic Work of the Spirit in Paul's Apologetics**

Commenting on 1 Thess. 1:5, Constable says: "The response of his converts was a supernatural work of God, not a natural response to a clearly delivered sermon. When Paul preached to them, he did not just share human opinion and philosophy (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1-5). Rather, his message was marked by the power of God (cf. Rom. 1:16). The Holy Spirit brought it home to their hearts with deep conviction" (Constable, 1985). Again, I ask the question: why could Paul's evangelistic campaigns not succeed on the merit of his message alone – why was the Holy Spirit a required component?

In examining Paul's message in the previous section, we first turned to the book of Acts and then his epistles. However, in analyzing the role of the Spirit in Paul's apologetics, we will reverse the order and first look at the Pauline corpus and then review the historical account of Paul's missionary activities as it relates to the Spirit. As to Paul's epistles, I focus on the book of 1 Corinthians because it is there that we most clearly learn answers to the questions I have posed above about the need for the Spirit in Paul's ministry, and in doing so I find at least three reasons for His participation.

#### *4.4.1.1 The Spirit at Work in Paul's Audience*

The first reason that the Spirit's involvement is required in Paul's apologetic framework is the cognitive and willful inability of his audience to respond to the gospel he delivered. As with the parable in Matt. 13, the same message of Paul would come to different soils with marked different results, so it stands to reason that something had to prepare the soil that actually ended up bearing fruit. Paul appears to convey that it is the noetic effects of sin that preclude the understanding and acceptance of the message he proclaimed, a truth he first presents in this way: "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). Paul continues in this epistle (vv. 19-21) to contrast two wisdoms – the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world. As to the latter, Paul describes it as an insufficiency to come to the knowledge of God insofar as His salvation plan is concerned. It is clear that Paul believes everyone is affected by this inability as he says in the book of Ephesians that even God's prophets required revelation from the Spirit to gain knowledge of the Creator's salvific design: "By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit" (Eph. 3:4-5).

The hurdle of the noetic effects of sin on both the messenger and the recipient of the gospel are made quite clear by the Apostle later in 1 Corinthians when he writes:

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Cor. 2:12-14).

Paul first underscores the fact that it was necessary for the Holy Spirit to override his fallen human wisdom to teach him the gospel. Next, he makes a very fascinating point that is of interest with respect to the infinite God and language: with the help of the Spirit, one is able to translate spiritual thoughts into language and words that are capable of accurately representing the thoughts of God, and which may be communicated and understood by finite human beings. This is implied from Paul's statement above. Various postmodernist philosophers and some Emerging Church leaders stop short of saying language is sufficient for such communication. For example, Rob Bell writes: "The Christian faith is mysterious to the core. It is about things and beings that ultimately can't be put into words. Language fails. And if we do definitively put God into words, we have at that very moment made God something God is not" (Bell, 2006: 32).

Yet even if one holds to the sufficiency of language for communication from God, in vs. 14, Paul makes a key statement as to why the message alone cannot suffice: humanity, without the Spirit's help, is unable to spiritually comprehend the validity and beauty of God's truth that is preached. This is why Paul says in 1 Thess. 1:5 that his gospel did not come in word only. The Apostle clearly states in 1 Cor. 2:14 that it could not; it would simply fall upon deaf ears, an unwilling heart, and not be understood because within the gospel message are things that are spiritually appraised, and an unregenerate person devoid of the Spirit is helpless to comprehend it. John Stott writes, "Blind eyes and hard hearts do not appreciate the gospel. . . . [There must be] the internal operation of

the Holy Spirit. It is only by His power that the Word can penetrate people's mind, heart, conscious, and will" (Stott, 1991: 34). The word for 'accept' in 1 Cor. 2:14 is δέχομαι, "to be receptive of", "to be open to" or "to approve" (Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, 2000). Turning the above definitions into the negative would mean that without the Spirit's intervention, the listeners of Paul's message would not be receptive of, not be open to, not approve of, and not accept the truths Paul was proclaiming. Regarding the need for the Spirit in Paul's message, Matthew Henry notes: "It came in the Holy Ghost, that is, with the powerful energy of the divine Spirit. Note, Wherever the gospel comes in power, it is to be attributed to the operation of the Holy Ghost; and unless the Spirit of God accompany the word of God, to render it effectual by his power, it will be to us but as a dead letter; and the letter killeth, it is the Spirit that giveth life" (Henry, 1996). The Apostle would later write something very similar to the Romans: "because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, *for it is not even able to do so,*" (Rom. 8:7, emphasis added).

In Acts, we see two brief illustrations of the Spirit working in just such a way as Henry describes. First, in Acts 13, we find a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit and His elective powers: "When the Gentiles heard this [Paul's declaration of his intention to preach the gospel to them], they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and *as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed*" (Acts 13:48, emphasis added). Toussaint comments that it is difficult to miss the doctrine of God's election here; the words "had been appointed" come from the verb τετραγμένοι, a military word meaning "to arrange" or "to assign", with the author using it here to show that God's elective decree also included Gentiles (Toussaint, 1995).

Then, in Acts 16, as previously covered in Chapter Three (cf. 3.4.1), we have the account of Paul's encounter with Lydia. These accounts in Acts and Paul's writings both appear to stress the sovereignty and election of God, and the work of His Spirit in the hearts and minds of those to whom the gospel message

comes. This is something Paul reiterates when he writes, "For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, *may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him*" (Eph. 1:15-17, emphasis added).

Paul speaks to this monergistic activity (which is defined as the action being completely a Divine work) of the Spirit in a number of places throughout his writings. He states that the Spirit brings confidence and conviction to the believer so that they may know they are truly God's child (Rom. 8:16); that it is the Spirit who is responsible for the faith placed in a believer (1 Cor. 2:4-5; Eph. 2:8-9); that it is the Spirit who reveals God's wisdom to people (1 Cor. 2:10); that the Spirit is the one who makes known the things of God to all (1 Cor. 2:12); that no one acknowledges Jesus is Lord except by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3); that the Spirit is the one who conforms the believer to the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:3); that the Spirit is the one who makes Paul adequate for the proclamation of the gospel (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5-6); that the Spirit is the one who takes away the veil that covers the human heart (2 Cor. 3:14-17); and that God Himself shines in the unbeliever's heart to bring the knowledge of God to them (2 Cor. 4:6). Paul makes clear through these verses that without the Spirit, his message would simply have no impact. If, indeed, preaching Christ crucified to Jews would only result in such a proclamation being a stumbling block (i.e. to the Jews, a crucified Messiah was a contradiction in terms) and to the Gentiles it was simply foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23), then, Paul says, only God's efficacious call to the Jewish and Greek elect would result in Christ being received as the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 24). This being true, we could refer to this as the Spirit's method rather than Paul's, or perhaps, state that Paul's method was one and the same with the Spirit's.

#### 4.4.1.2 *The Spirit's Work in Glorifying God*

This leads now to the second reason for the Holy Spirit's monergistic role in Paul's apologetics. In 1 Cor. 2, Paul states his dependence upon the Spirit when he says, "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:3-5). Here, Paul gives the next reason for the inclusion of the Spirit: it is so that God would receive the glory for the salvation of His elect and not anyone else. Paul had previously alluded to this point earlier when he wrote: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void" (1 Cor. 1:17). If, Paul says, people were won to the gospel with cleverness (literally *sophia* – wisdom) in message design, then the cross of Christ would literally be without result and have no effect (Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, 2000). Paul speaks to the inner working of the Spirit of God and the proper target of credit and glory when he writes, "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves" (2 Cor. 4:6-7).

#### 4.4.1.3 *The Spirit's Directive Work*

The third and final monergistic function that the Spirit played in Paul's apologetic framework was one of direction. The Holy Spirit determined everything in Paul's evangelistic endeavors including who would perform the work, what message would be preached, and where the missionaries would travel. With respect to who would be involved in the early Church's primary missionary activities, we read in Acts: "While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2). As there were a number of

others in the Antioch church at this time that belonged to the Lord, this speaks to the fact that the Holy Spirit called out exactly who He wanted to engage in the special work that lay ahead. The verb “set apart” (ἀφορίσατε) is used of three separations in Paul’s life by God – at his birth he was separated to God (Gal. 1:15); at his conversion he was set apart for the gospel (Rom. 1:1); and in Antioch he was separated for specific service (Acts 13:2) (Toussaint, 1985).

As has previously been discussed in this chapter, the message Paul brought was given to him by a revelation from the Spirit and was not his own. Regarding where Paul would go, we first read in Acts: "So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus" (Acts 13:4). We then read later in Acts a more descriptive account of the Spirit’s direction in the ministry of Paul: "They [Paul and his companions] passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having *been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia*; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and *the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them*;" (Acts 16:6-7, emphasis added). How the Spirit accomplished these hindrances is not stated by the author of Acts – it may have been circumstances, a word of prophecy, a vision, or some other phenomenon. We do see, however, visions being used by God in the very next set of verses, which state: "A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them" (Acts 16:9-10). Paul alludes to these directings recorded in Acts in his second letter to the Corinthians when he says, "Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and *when a door was opened for me in the Lord*" (2 Cor. 2:12, emphasis added).

This form of divine leadership in Paul’s ministry is not unique to the Apostle because earlier in Acts, we find a similar account involving Peter and not Paul with respect to the Spirit’s leading direction – the account of Cornelius where we read: "While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him,

'Behold, three men are looking for you. But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself'" (Acts 10:19-20). This clear leading of the Spirit is akin to how the Old Testament states that God leads his people. As Isaiah says: "Your ears will hear a word behind you, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right or to the left" (Is. 30:21).

#### *4.4.1.4 Conclusion of the Spirit's Monergistic Activities*

In summary, the monergistic work of the Spirit in Paul's apologetic framework included (1) the illumination of both the listener's mind and heart to properly comprehend and accept the gospel message; (2) the assurance that nothing would receive glory for the salvation of the audience other than God alone; (3) the divine direction of who would perform the evangelistic tasks, what message would be preached, and where the preaching would be done. We now look at the next part of the Spirit's role in Paul's method to see if there is a synergistic partnership between the infinite and the finite.

#### **4.4.2 The Synergistic Partnership between the Spirit and Paul**

The monergistic work of the Spirit came with power and conviction, but there appears to be another aspect to the Spirit's work in Paul's ministry, which is a synergistic partnership that also worked to bring about power and conviction in the evangelistic proclamation of the Apostle. In the Pauline corpus, there are numerous references to the partnership that existed between Paul and the Spirit. Paul says the grace of God labored within him (1 Cor. 15:10); that God was in him doing the work (Phil. 2:13); that God's power was mightily working within him (Col. 1:29); that he had been given not a spirit of fear but of power, love, and discipline (2 Tim. 1:7); and that the Holy Spirit was the one guarding the message within those who preach (2 Tim 1:13-14).

This cooperative effort between Paul and the Spirit externally manifested itself in at least two ways: (1) through Paul's own personal conviction that exhibited itself through bold oratory addresses and convincing techniques; (2) through miracles that appeared throughout the ministry of Paul.

At first glance, it could be argued that Paul did not attempt to utilize any of the rhetoric training he received in his youth nor try to influence his audience in his *apologias* via the material he presented. A number of verses that could be used in support of this point include:

- "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, *not in cleverness of speech*, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void." (1 Cor. 1:17, emphasis added)
- "And when I came to you, brethren, *I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom*, proclaiming to you the testimony of God." (1 Cor. 2:1, emphasis added)
- "and my message and my preaching *were not in persuasive words of wisdom*, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," (1 Cor. 2:4, emphasis added)
- "For they say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his *speech contemptible*.'" (2 Cor. 10:10, emphasis added)
- "But even if I am *unskilled in speech*, yet I am not so in knowledge" (2 Cor. 11:6, emphasis added)
- "For we *never came with flattering speech*, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed – God is witness –" (1 Thess. 2:5, emphasis added)

The above verses do not preclude the injection of rhetorical techniques or imply a lack of reliance upon proper and solid convincing evidences, but rather they speak to the fact that Paul believed human wisdom alone was insufficient (and perhaps even detrimental because of the noetic effects of sin) for the task of conversion. Paul held to the fact that natural humanity needs more than natural

knowledge to experience salvation – something Mortimer Adler speaks to when he writes:

“There are two types of knowledge: natural and supernatural. Our knowledge is natural knowledge if the only means involved in attaining it are the powers inherent in the nature of the human mind . . . In sharp contrast, human knowledge is supernatural if human beings come into possession of it only by the gift of it to them by supernatural agencies . . . Supernatural knowledge is knowledge human beings would not possess without divine intervention” (Adler, 1990: 51).

I have already shown that Paul confirmed the fact that the wisdom he proclaimed came not from the world but via divine revelation (Gal. 1:12) and he also believed natural humanity was incapable of properly processing the Spirit-given revelation of salvation (1 Cor. 2:14). Paul gave no place to calculated theatrics and techniques to manipulate response because they simply could not produce the desired end result of salvation for his listeners – that would require a supernaturally revealed message in conjunction with supernatural aid from the Spirit. However, such a reality did not prohibit Paul from employing rhetoric and various debating techniques. Indeed, he did just that while cooperating with the Spirit’s work. This is something that now will be explored.

Immediately after his Damascus road experience, we find the following written about Paul: "But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 9:22). Paul’s evangelistic engagements with the Jews resulted in them being “confounded” (from συγχέω– literally ‘pour together’ or trouble the mind), because the Apostle was ‘proving’ the Messiahship of Jesus, which is a word (συμβιβάζων) that means to draw a conclusion in the face of evidence or to present a logical conclusion (Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, 2000). From the meaning of these words in Acts 9:22, we can infer Paul was not simply stating a basic call to salvation devoid of rationale and forensic methodology, and waiting for the Spirit to supernaturally come to his aid, but instead his method

included utilizing logical arguments that built to a conclusion at which point the Spirit would or would not engage the audience's will.

This example is hardly an isolated incident in the book of Acts. Six times (17:2, 17:17, 18:4, 18:19, 19:8, 19:9), the author of the history of the early Church records that Paul "reasoned" or was "reasoning" (διαλέγομαι) with his evangelistic prospects about the truths of Christianity, which means he was engaged in dialogue that involved the use of arguments and instructional discourse that frequently included the exchange of opinions (Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, 2000). Witherington asserts that Paul's form of arguments were that of enthymemes, a rhetorical form of a syllogism that normally consisted of three parts, two of which were arguments that led to the concluding third part (Witherington, 1998b, 505). These are seen throughout the book of Acts. In Acts 9:29, Paul is "arguing" with his opponents; in 14:1, he "spoke in such a manner" that a large number of unbelievers were converted; in 17:3 the Apostle is "explaining and giving evidence"; in 18:5 he is "solemnly testifying" (also used in 20:21 and 28:23); in 19:8, Paul is "persuading"; in 19:26 his opponents admit that Paul has "persuaded" people; in 20:2, he gave "much exhortation"; and in 28:23, the Apostle is "explaining" and attempting to "persuade".

These accounts do not support any conclusion that Paul discounted the use of logic, reason, or rhetorical techniques utilized for the purposes of convincing his audience when he was engaged in apologetic situations. To those such as Dennison who argue that Paul did not endorse the above for use in his apologetic methodology (Dennison, 1985: 112), I respectfully contend that they have rejected the proper place of reason and logic given by God via general revelation because they conflate it and faith together and assert the two do not mix. I also agree with the contention that faith is separate from reason in one regard, as Tozer says: "The faith that saves is not a conclusion drawn from evidence; it is a moral thing, a thing of the spirit, a supernatural infusion of confidence in Jesus Christ, a very gift of God" (Tozer, 1980A: 166). But I agree

with Aquinas on the proper use of reason – the type of reason that Paul used – which Aquinas details in this somewhat lengthy, but informative statement:

“There are two kinds of human reasoning. One is demonstrative, compelling the mind’s assent. There can be no place in matters of faith for this kind of reasoning, but there can be in disproving claims that faith is impossible. For although matters of faith cannot be demonstratively proved, neither can they be demonstratively disproved. If this sort of reasoning were brought forward to prove what is held on faith, the merit of faith would be destroyed, because the assent to it would not be voluntary but necessary. But persuasive reasoning, drawn from analogies to the truth of faith, does not take away the nature of faith because it does not render them evident, for there is no reduction to first principles intuited by the mind. Neither does it deprive faith of its merit, because it does not compel the mind’s assent but leaves the assent voluntary” (Aquinas, 1999: 28).

Part of Paul’s oratory techniques and use of this type of διαλέγομαι appears to be the use of what can be labeled ‘truth anchors’ – points of mutually agreed upon truth that he used to establish a position from which to work with the objective being to move a person from a particular established place of truth to the agreement on the full gospel message. Most commonly, we find the Apostle using the Old Testament Scriptures as his epistemological anchor with his Jewish audience. This is the case in his longest speeches, those recorded in Acts 13 and 26. For example, in his defense before King Agrippa, Paul begins by genuinely complimenting Agrippa as being “an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews” and concludes his *apologia* before the king with these words: “King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? *I know that you do*” (Acts 26:27, emphasis added). Paul attempted to anchor Agrippa in the epistemic foundation of the Old Testament prophets, which was evidently a previously established base of truth for the king. Here, the Apostle’s unspoken assertion was evidently that if the king assented to the truth of the prophets, he should logically acquiesce to the new truths Paul was presenting as they were simply the logical next step to what the facts were pointing towards.

Another characteristic of Paul’s rhetoric that appears to be identified in the Biblical accounts of his campaigns was boldness. This is something that was

produced as part of his method through the conviction of the Holy Spirit mentioned in 1 Thess. 1:5. The word *παρρησιάζομαι* is used to communicate the fact Paul expressed himself openly and fearlessly (Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, 2000) and is used five times in Acts to describe his method of communication. Paul validates this behavior a number of places in his epistles, such as in his second letter to the Corinthians: "Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech" (2 Cor. 3:12) and his epistle to the Ephesians: "pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:19).

This boldness was likely derived from the Spirit's infusion of confidence within him and was sometimes accompanied by the last piece of the Apostle's method, which was the Spirit's gift of miracles in the ministry of Paul. On one hand, we shall see in Acts Paul using miracles in the midst of unbelievers, but on the other hand, we will find that Paul seldom references their deployment in his own letters.

#### *4.4.2.1 Paul's Miracles in Acts*

In Acts 14, we read: "Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands" (Acts 14:3). The Spirit's charisms to Paul included the invoking of miraculous signs that testified to the truth of Paul's gospel message, and provided an *apologia* that would be held in high esteem by the early church, a point F. F. Bruce validates: "The argument from prophecy and the argument from miracle were regarded by first-century Christians, as by their successors in the second and many following centuries, as the strongest evidences for the truth of the gospel" (Bruce, 1977: 16).

A number of commentators such as Toussaint claim that the writer of Acts is not interested in recording Paul's miracles to highlight their apologetic value,

but rather to help establish Paul's ministry as being on par with Peter's (Toussaint, 1995). Regardless of the author's intent, the book of Acts records at least eight mentions of Paul performing miracles or it describes a miraculous event surrounding him that specifically had a positive evangelistic effect on unbelievers (13:10; 14:3; 14:10; 15:12; 16:26; 19:11; 28:3-5; and 28:8-9).

It is important to note that miracles did not accompany each *apologia* or gospel proclamation by Paul. For example, one might think a huge impression would have been made on the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers on Mars Hill if Paul had performed a supernatural sign before them, but he did not. Neither did the Apostle use his opportunities before Felix, Festus, or King Agrippa to meld his apologetic speeches with a miracle. This begs at least two questions: (1) Why did Paul not exercise his miraculous charisma more often? (2) Is there any distinguishable pattern that emerges as to why and when Paul chose to demonstrate his gift of miracles?

In Acts 13, Paul's message was being challenged by the magus Elymas and so Paul chose to miraculously demonstrate whose power – God's or the magician's – was greater. This episode is in keeping with the historical use of miracles such as during the time of Moses and Elijah when their miracles were used to prove the truth claims of God over the false gods worshipped by the people (the gods of Egypt, Baal). Acts 14 records two cases of Paul's gift of miracles being exercised. The first mentions that God sovereignly granted Paul and his companions the use of signs as an apologetic buttress after opposition to the gospel message appeared via the work of the unbelieving Jews: "Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands" (Acts 14:3). As with Acts 13, in this case miracles appear after opposition to the gospel rears its head. However, when the missionaries flee to Lystra (vv. 6-18), we find no overt reference in Acts to external opposition that would seem to necessitate the miracle Paul performs upon a lame man in vv. 9-10. One might argue that use of miracles in Lystra may have been warranted so

as to add weight to Paul's message among a superstitious populous who recounted stories of gods (Zeus and Hermes) coming down and roaming through their region, but other than pure speculation, there is no objective way to confirm such a theory.

In Acts 16, the miracle of the earthquake and Paul and Silas' chains being unfastened after their arrest from preaching the gospel in their first European city could certainly be interpreted as being in response to the opposition experienced by the missionaries at Philippi. Evidently the jailer had enough information from the events in question to infer the type of message the two disciples were carrying. The validity of Paul's message was established by the miracle, with God's authority and power over that of the Roman colony also being confirmed. The Spirit's power was also on display in a very visible way during Paul's third missionary journey as he ministered in Ephesus: "God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out" (Acts 19:11-12).

Regarding opposition to the gospel message Paul brought, the book of Acts tells us that some became hardened and overtly spoke "evil of the Way" but it is difficult to ascertain the exact timing of vs. 11 - was it before or after the opposition to Paul's message began? Regardless of this, what is known is that Ephesus was an epicenter for magic as vv. 18-19 bear witness, with history also recording the fact that the term "Ephesian writings" was commonly used in antiquity for documents containing spells and magical formulae (cf. Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 12.548; Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* 5.242, in Longenecker, 2003) so it does not seem to be unreasonable to infer that Paul's miracles were part of God's strategy to demonstrate the truthfulness of the Apostle's message in the heart of Satan's territory.

The last recorded miracles of Paul occur in Acts 28 after his shipwreck on the island of Malta. After witnessing Paul's immunity to the viper that fastened

onto his hand as well as his healing miracles, the end result was the populous honoring the missionaries with “many marks of respect” (lit. “honors”). Hardon interprets this verse as equating to “mass conversion of the island to the faith of Christ” (Hardon, 1998) even though the author of Acts does not explicitly record such a thing taking place on Malta. Paul first being mistaken by the pagan crowds on Malta as a god is akin to his experience at Lystra, so it is not unreasonable to conclude that Paul would have corrected them and rightly identified God as the true source of his miracles as he did in Acts 14, but we have no explicit data in Acts as to what the outcome of such correction was.

Having reviewed Paul’s miracles throughout Acts, let us now return to our questions posed above regarding Paul’s use of miracles. As to why Paul did not appear to exercise his gift more frequently, verses such as Acts 14:3 make it clear that the Spirit was in direct control over when and where Paul used his charisma during his evangelistic proclamations. Regarding whether or not any distinguishable pattern of the miraculous presents itself, it is tempting to argue for various ethnic bifurcations (Jew versus Gentile) or oppositional predicaments the Apostle found himself in where the truth claims of God were pitted against enemy antagonism, but I do not believe with the data we have that it can definitively be done. Ethnic mixtures were present during various episodes of Paul’s miraculous activities, and while Paul employed miracles to override opposing arguments to the gospel message at times, there were other encounters where he did not (e.g. Mars Hill). It appears no discernable pattern of the Apostle’s use of miracles can be brought forward with any clear evidence.

#### *4.4.2.2 Mentions of Miracles in Paul’s Epistles*

What does the Apostle say about the use of miracles and their apologetic value in his own writings? The answer is, very little in fact. There are two mentions in the epistles that speak directly to the use of miracles in Paul’s evangelistic campaigns. To the Romans, Paul writes: “For I will not presume to speak of

anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (Rom. 15:18–19). A fuller explanation of this particular verse can be found in Chapter Three (cf. section 3.4.1).

Another mention of the use of miracles is found in Galatians: “So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles [δυνάμεις, literally “works of powers”] among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?” (Gal. 3:5). This particular statement may be linked back to Acts and Paul’s activities in Iconium and Lystra (cf. 14:3, 8-11).

In 2 Corinthians we have a final picture of miracles in Paul’s writings, with perhaps a glimpse into what the Apostle may have considered to be the primary use of miracles in his ministry: to confirm his apostleship. To the Corinthians he writes, “I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles” (2 Cor. 12:11–12).

Paul calls attention to the fact that the supernatural acts he manifested should have served to quiet all suspicion about his apostleship. Signs (σημείους, miracles with significant emphasis); wonders (τέρασιν, something that astounds because of a transcendent association); and miracles (δυνάμεσιν, potential for functioning due to a supernatural power) are all evidences that distinguished an apostle like Paul (cf. Acts 2:22, 43; Heb. 2:4). While the book of Acts does not explicitly record the fact that Paul performed any miracles in Corinth or highlight an apologetic effect from them, the Apostle does briefly point out that he worked miracles there (they were “performed among you”), but the thrust of his statement is that they were used to confirm his authority and not directly

win converts to Christ. The conclusion, then, is that the brief mentions in Paul's letters of miracles do appear to minimize the overall importance that they played in his evangelistic campaigns.

Leaving now the discussion of Paul and miracles, we next turn to what significance the second component of Paul's apologetic framework might have had on his first century society.

#### **4.4.3 Paul's Method in His Culture and Society**

Paul's alliance with the Holy Spirit and his bold logical argumentation may have supplied his first century audience with at least two things: a feeling of certainty and a sense of right allegiance.

For the skeptical Academician, or for those who were left in a state of confusion over the claims of the many mystery cults and sects that existed in the first century, the Holy Spirit used Paul to produce a state of complete certainty in those that were converted. As was seen in the exegesis of 1 Thess. 1:5 (cf. Chapter Three, 3.3.1), the Holy Spirit moved upon the Thessalonians to create in them an assurance and confidence that the gospel was indeed true. At a time when the Hellenistic-Roman world was awash in many competing faiths and had witnessed a succession of barbarian invasions, bloody civil wars, various plagues, famines, and economic predicaments, Paul gave the people something solid to cling to.

However, this sense of certainty and stability was linked to the people pledging their allegiance to the One Paul proclaimed to be the only true Lord and King, Jesus. Paul's logical argumentation made it very clear to his listeners: if Jesus was Lord then Artemis was not (cf. Acts 19). To the adherents of the emperor cults, Paul proclaimed another King and the people would need to decide who would receive their ultimate loyalty where worship was concerned. This was something that was non-negotiable as Wright makes clear: "No herald in the

ancient world would say ‘Tiberius Caesar has become emperor: accept him if it suits you!’” (Wright, 1997: 157). The call to Jesus from Paul was a royal announcement and a new way of life, and not something that was to be evaluated in light of the people’s personal preferences.

This was a provocative thing. As was seen in the earlier discussion of Paul’s message (cf. 4.3.4), there was a confrontational aspect to Paul’s gospel and this would have stirred up controversy in the culture. The riot in Ephesus provoked by Demetrius (cf. Acts 19:23-41) was not a complete misunderstanding; Paul was indeed a threat to them because he demanded an allegiance that turned the people away from idols. Any denial implies an affirmation of something, and for Paul, it was the announcement of a true God as opposed to false gods. This included not only idols but anything that demanded ultimate loyalty from the people, including the emperor (see discussion in Chapter 2, 2.2.2.1 on the implications of emperor cults). For example, Wright argues that Paul’s language in Philippians 2:5-11, which was addressed to a Roman colony, borrowed language from the imperial cult (Wright, 1997: 57). Paul was telling his audience in Philippi that Caesar was not their *kyrios* and *soter*, but instead, Jesus was. He was the one who deserved their ultimate allegiance and not the emperor.

#### **4.4.4 Summary**

The second *tria martus* piece of Paul’s apologetic framework – the Apostle’s method – is comprised of the Holy Spirit Who worked in both a monergistic and synergistic fashion with Paul in his apologetic encounters. First, from a monergistic standpoint, the Spirit’s role was threefold: (1) To overcome the noetic effects of sin and rebellious heart in the unbelievers Paul preached to so they would receive the gospel message; (2) To ensure nothing and no one other than God would receive the glory for a sinner’s conversion; (3) To provide direction to His chosen messengers as to where they would go and who would hear the salvific proclamation.

Second, from a synergistic perspective, it appears the Spirit enabled Paul in at least two ways: (1) Through a personal conviction that manifested itself in the Apostle via bold oratory addresses and techniques designed to convince the mind of what the heart in his audience was being told was true by the Spirit; (2) Through miracles that were utilized at various points of time in the ministry of Paul. The combination of the monergistic and synergistic work of the Spirit that make up Paul's method in his apologetic framework allowed his listeners to comprehend the goodness of the gospel message at the epistemic level and receive it at another level where belief actually occurs – the will – which is necessary because human beings are quite able to act contrary to epistemological evidence. In this way, Paul mirrors what Pascal wrote many years later:

“Men despise religion. They hate it and are afraid it may be true. The cure of this is first to show that religion is not contrary to reason, but worthy of reverence and respect. Next make it attractive, make good men wish it were true, and then show that it is. Worthy of reverence because it really understands human nature. Attractive because it promises true good” (Pascal, 2003: 46).

In the next section I will examine the third and final part of Paul's apologetic framework – a component I label Paul's *manner*.

#### **4.5 THE MANNER OF PAUL**

Hays, in describing the aftereffects of God's plan of salvation as preached by Paul on human beings, says this:

“There are three ‘warrants’ for obedience that are inherent parts of Paul's gospel: (1) Through union with Christ, we undergo transformation that should cause to us ‘walk in newness of life.’; (2) Because God has liberated us from sin's power, we should transfer our allegiance to the One who liberated us; (3) Because the Spirit is at work in the community of faith, the fruit of the Spirit should be exhibited in the community's life” (Hays, 1996: 39).

This commentary well describes Paul's succinct statement in the latter fragment of the key verse with which we have concerned ourselves throughout this chapter - 1 Thess. 1:5 - where Paul says, "just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake." This is the third piece of Paul's apologetic framework: his *manner*. It provides a living exhibition of the gospel message that went beyond logical propositions and forensic/rhetorical arguments designed to persuade. In essence, this is "apologetics with a touch."

Paul's manner can be segmented into at least five distinct manifestations, all of which played a part in his apologetics ministry: (1) His radical departure from his former manner of life and new walk in the Christian faith that was made known by his own personal witness as well as through others' personal observations of the former Pharisee; (2) His belief that his identity was bound up with Christ; (3) His reaction to adversity and suffering; (4) His admonition for those in the Church to follow his example; (5) His genuine love and concern for both unbelievers and those inside the Church, and a desire to build Christian community. I will now attempt to provide evidence for these assertions by briefly examining both the book of Acts and the Pauline Corpus.

#### **4.5.1 From Saul to Paul**

With respect to the change that took place with Paul from his old way of life to his new, there are two facets that are worth noting. First, Paul had gone from being a persecutor of the Church to being a church planter; from someone who had brutalized Christians to someone who was devoted to making more Christian followers; from a person with no regard for a dead Nazarene carpenter to a person who openly declared Jesus of Nazareth as being the living Son of God. This fact was not lost on those he came into contact with early after his conversion, with the book of Acts recording the following: "All those hearing him [Paul] continued to be amazed, and were saying, 'Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests'" (Acts

9:21). The fact that Paul saw such a change in his life as being part of his witness is evidenced by two statements made in Acts 22 during his defense before the Jews. As he begins his *apologia*, Paul first declares, "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons," (Acts 22:4). Then later in the same speech, when he relays an exchange he had with Jesus during a vision, Paul testifies that he made the following statement regarding the power he believed his transformed life would have on unbelievers: "And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. 'And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him'" (Acts 22:19-20). Another example of Paul using his changed life as a witness occurs in Acts 26 before King Agrippa. Here Paul says, "And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities" (Acts 26:10-11). Outside of Acts, Paul also refers to this aspect of his personal witness in his letter to the Galatians when he writes:

"For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it . . . I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; but only, they kept hearing, 'He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.' And they were glorifying God because of me" (Gal. 1:13, 22-24).

The second aspect of Paul's transformation that would give unbelievers pause was his movement from being a monotheistic Jewish Pharisee to a man who worshipped and served a criminal executed by the Romans who claimed to be God. Paul referred to his former life a number of times as being something others were fully aware of, one example being his defense before Agrippa: "So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a

Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion" (Acts 26:4-5). We find examples of the same testimony in the Pauline corpus, such as the statements the Apostle made to the Galatians where he links his devotion to Judaism with his persecution of the Church: "For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions" (Gal. 1:13-14). Both of these key aspects of Paul's former life – his maltreatment of the Church and the dismissal of his former Pharisaic devotion – contributed to his overall apologetic witness. Such a radical change evidently did not go unnoticed (according to the evidence above) in the audiences to which he preached. Paul was not converted to a "new god", but rather to a new service of the God he had known as a Pharisee. The difference was, now he served God's Son through the Holy Spirit (Acts 22:14).

#### **4.5.2 Paul the Bond-Servant**

When struck down on the Damascus road, Paul was instantly humbled and changed into a servant of Jesus. Of this revolution in Paul's life, Calvin says: "What shall I do, Lord?' This is the voice of a tamed man, and this is the true turning unto the Lord; when laying away all fierceness and fury, we bow down our necks willingly to bear his yoke, and are ready to do whatsoever he commandeth us. . . . As Paul was puffed up with Pharisaical pride, it was meet that he should be afflicted and thrown down, that he might hear Christ's voice" (Calvin, 1585). Hearing Christ's voice resulted in Paul becoming what he would call a "bond-servant of Christ Jesus" (Rom. 1:1, Titus 1:1) – in effect, Christ's slave. This has more importance than it might appear on the surface; it should be noted that being a slave of anyone was not a goal of Greco-Roman society. People were generally not eager to be the servant of others; indeed the populace deprecated and ridiculed slavish behavior (Witherington, 1998: 170). A person calling themselves something else's slave would certainly not go overlooked.

Servant and apostle converged in that both were now implementers of another's will and plans. This mindset would produce at least two external developments in Paul's life that contributed to his overall apologetic framework. First, it resulted in the Apostle openly declaring that nothing in life was more important than knowing and serving his Master and that all things he previously possessed were now willingly jettisoned (Phil 3:7-8). Moreover, it meant that Paul was willing to consider himself less important than others; that their needs and especially their need for salvation came above all else. The word (ταπεινοφροσύνη) Paul uses in Phil. 2:3 to underscore this point in his writings, translated 'humility' in the NASB, means to be base-minded or act like a slave. Neither was a complimentary description in ancient times. But for Paul, this was a key witness for him.

The second action it produced in the Apostle was that he was ready to personally become whatever was necessary to do the will of Christ. The former prideful Pharisee would now metamorphose to be whatever was needed by his unbelieving audience so they would follow His Master - something he made clear in his corpus:

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:19-22).

Paul's manner was one of accommodation - not in the realms of truth or morality, but rather personal adaptations that demonstrated how God's plan of salvation was for everyone: Jew, non-Jew, adherent to the Law, spiritually immature, etc. Paul's denial of himself, he believed, would result in more turning to Christ, a point he speaks to in his first address to the Corinthians: "Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I

also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved" (1 Cor. 10:32-33). The desire to offend no one, Paul says elsewhere, is so that the gospel ministry will not be damaged from a reputation standpoint: "giving no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited" (2 Cor. 6:3).

#### **4.5.3 Paul and Persecution**

In the same way that first century Greco-Roman society looked down upon slavish behavior, it also scorned pacifism (Witherington, 1998: 181). And yet, while Paul the Pharisee was more than prepared to use force to make Christians conform to Jewish orthopraxy, Paul the servant of Christ exhibited something much different to those who would oppose his message. "When we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate" (1 Cor. 4:12-13) became the Apostle's manner after his divine enlistment into the Christian faith. Nowhere is found in the Pauline corpus even a hint of "an eye for an eye". Whether it was singing praise to God after being beaten without cause in Philippi (Acts 16) or simply letting an insult as being called a 'seed picker' by the pagan philosophers in Athens go unanswered (Acts 17:18), Paul chose not to react in anger.

Paul's quietism was part of his overall apologetic framework with Romans 12:14-21 serving as the primary example of evidence for this position. Running throughout this passage, the former persecutor makes the theme of non-retaliation quite evident, with doing good to those who persecute being repeated at least four times. The section is framed by a beatitude in vs. 14 and a command in vs. 21, the intent being to present a Christocentric manner to the hostile world that surrounded the Church. The end result to the Christian enemy would be to "heap burning coals on his head", which was probably a reference to an Egyptian practice in which a person showed his repentance by carrying a pan of burning charcoal on their head (Toussaint, 1995). Helping rather than cursing an enemy, wrote Paul, may cause him to be ashamed and

penitent. The coals symbolized his change to a tender mind, which fits in the context of Romans 12 where a love deed could help melt a person to repentance – again, a radical departure from how first century society typically treated those who caused them harm. Such behavior could not have gone unnoticed in the first century culture.

#### **4.5.4 Paul the Example**

Commenting on Paul's introduction of himself as a servant in some of his letters and the announcement of his apostleship in other epistles, Witherington argues that the Apostle was never concerned that his audiences recognize his authority and leadership, but rather he wished to provide an example for his readers to follow. He further states that one of the major pedagogical tools of ancient teachers was modeling, especially for beginning or immature learners, with Quintilian stressing the importance of modeling and indicating how he used it successfully (Witherington, 1998: 86, 171). Paul desired the witness of his manner be replicated out as an example to all who would come to believe in the gospel message he preached.

There are at least two aspects to Paul's mindset of his being an example to those around him – one for unbelievers and one for believers. For unbelievers, it appears clear Paul thought of himself as a prime example of God's mercy and grace toward even the worst of sinners, a thought he articulates for his student Timothy: "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience *as an example* for those who would believe in Him for eternal life" (1 Tim. 1:15-16, emphasis added). From such a statement, Paul evidently believed his former life would serve as a testimony that opposed any thought an unbeliever would have of being unworthy of God's salvific grace.

The second aspect of Paul's example would be directed toward believers. The Apostle unabashedly requested that his readers imitate his manner of life to everyone they would come into contact with. However, Paul made it clear that they would really be replicating Christ's persona in duplicating his conduct, a point he speaks to in his first letter to the Corinthians: "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1) and in his second: "For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" (2 Cor. 2:15). A final plea to follow Christ/God as an example is found in this simple verse in Ephesians: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children" (Eph. 5:1).

Throughout the Pauline corpus there are numerous other references to Paul's admonition for others to follow the example of his personal lifestyle. He reminds believers of the example he sometimes painstakingly exhibited before them (Acts 20:35); exhorts others to imitate him (1 Cor. 4:16); tells the Corinthians he teaches his ways everywhere in every church (1 Cor. 4:17); says other believers are human examples of his letters read by "all men" (2 Cor. 3:2); asks that believers join others in following his manner of life (Phil. 3:16), and practice the things they saw lived out through him (Phil. 4:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-9).

One can only conclude that Paul thought that such a duplication of his way of life would result in a positive witness for the gospel to which he was devoted. The key verse with which we have worked throughout this chapter - 1 Thess. 1:5 - is followed by evidence that Paul's hope of others following his example was being realized: "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia" (1 Thess. 1:6-7; see 1 Thess. 2:14 also). Another strong substantiation that the third witness of Paul's framework was active among his church plantings is found in 2 Cor. 3:2 where he tells the Corinthians, "You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all." The fruit of Paul created by the Spirit was now bearing fruit in those he converted.

#### 4.5.5 The Love of Paul

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, Paul's manner was one of a three-fold love for his Lord, those outside the Church, and those inside the household of faith. Paul the cold aggressor and legalist had now become a person who could write of the key attribute that witnessed above everything else in 1 Cor. 13 – love for God and those around him. The one who was supremely educated in knowledge had come to the point of saying that knowledge devoid of love only makes arrogant, but love edifies (1 Cor. 8:1).

The book of Acts and the Pauline corpus testify to a tenderness that had come over the Apostle for both the unbelieving world and those inside the Church. As to the latter, in his farewell address to the Ephesian believers in Acts 20, he tells them that “night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears” (Acts 20:31). He tells the Galatian believers they are his “little children” (Gal. 4:19). He reminds the Corinthians that whenever they experience pain, he is wounded as well (2 Cor. 11:29). He speaks of the Philippian believers as “having them in his heart” (Phil 1:7). He tells the Thessalonian church that he “abounds” in love for them (1 Thess. 3:12) and demonstrated that fact by living among them and helping build up a Christian community (cf. 1 Thess. 1 & 2). Repeatedly throughout his writings, Paul reminds his believing readers of his care and love for them.

Paul's attitude toward unbelievers is one of caring and deep concern as well, with perhaps the clearest example of this being his articulation in the letter to the Romans of the sorrow he felt for his fellow Israelites who had not come to faith in Christ: "I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:1-3). This type of angst exhibited by Paul for unbelievers was also not restricted to

his own nationality, but extended to non-Jews as well. As just one small example, when he entered Athens, the text in Acts 17:16 makes clear that Paul was both repulsed and “greatly distressed” over the idolatrous situation the city was in. Yet, he deeply cared about God’s rightful place as well as the people who were involved in false worship and immediately went about trying to engage the pagan unbelievers in discourse about the gospel to which he had been entrusted (Acts 17:17-34). From this account, one could argue that an apologetic might begin with a provoked spirit. However, one must also remember that Paul did not return to Athens; perhaps this is a case of shaking the dust from one’s feet (Matt. 10:14).

What kind of significance did these four aspects of Paul’s manner – his position on being a bond-servant for Christ, his response to persecution, his intention on living an exemplary life, and his genuine love for both believers and unbelievers – have on the first century culture? Let’s take a brief look at some possibilities.

#### **4.5.6 The Cultural Significance of Paul’s Manner for the First Century**

For unbelieving Gentiles, Paul’s announcement of the gospel brought to surprised pagans the news that there was a true God, who was alive and involved, caring and loving, and who had acted and was acting within their history and within themselves to recreate the created world. Such a message should have been at its most powerful for the first century people when it was lived out in human terms and praxis and not merely recited in dogma and story. And this is exactly what Paul did. Paul’s stance appeared to be one where addressing his non-Christian audience and their desire for *soteria* was more than just merely giving them all the right answers where the Creator was concerned. Theologies, Paul believed, determined the way people lived and how they treated one another (cf. 1 Thess. 2).

This distinction of Paul's espoused manner should have been appealing to the first century mind. They could see that Christian kindness and charity was not confined only to its members, but it was universal in nature. Paul routinely espoused giving freely to and clothing the poor, visiting the sick, etc (cf. Gal. 2:10). Paul may very well have seen first century's paganism and its indifference toward others as a self-destructive mode of being human. As opposed to it, he offered a way of being human which, based firmly on its Jewish foundations, had been reworked in the light of Jesus (Wright, 1997: 89).

Such a position and practice would differ from what the people received at the hands of the Stoics and Epicureans. Unlike the deterministic and apathetic Stoic philosophy that left its first century adherents with a feeling of encumbrance and in need of deliverance (cf. Chapter Two, 2.2.2.1) or the Epicureans who were not at all concerned for the welfare of the general populace (cf. Chapter Two, 2.2.2.2), Christianity's acceptance of all people without distinction and its communal organization – a close-knit community bound together in fellowship and love – should have had universal appeal during the Hellenistic-Roman period. Tripolitis argues that Christianity's sense of community and its universal charity were a major reason, if not the most important single reason, for its growth and subsequent victory over the empire and other competing religions and philosophies (Tripolitis, 2002: 97).

Even persecution had a positive aspect to it. In a Greco-Roman culture that did not practice pacifism toward opponents, the exercise of kindness being extended to those who persecuted and insulted a person should have been seen as a radical departure from the norm and something that stood out among other movements of the time. As a persecuted sect, Christianity was forced to become a tightly bounded, organized, and disciplined community with its members being held together by a common rite, a community of life, and by their common danger. From the very outset, the Christianity community gave its members a true sense of belonging and a sense of security. Wright sums up

this point by saying, “[For Paul] there is no such thing as an ‘individual’ Christian. Paul’s gospel created a community” (Wright, 1997: 158).

#### **4.5.7 Summary**

The third and final component in Paul’s apologetic framework is his *manner*. This was a personal testimony that spoke to both unbelievers and believers alike about the truth of the gospel message the Apostle carried. His transformation from a violent Pharisee who regarded Jesus of Nazareth as a false messiah to a devoted follower of Christ could not help but give people pause as to what caused such an about face in personal direction. The abandonment of his position and pride, and his willingness to publicly state in a society that saw being a slave as completely undesirable, that he was a bond-servant of Jesus must have caused individuals to wonder what might have initiated such a change in personal identity.

Part of Paul’s manner also included an exemplary life that spoke to both non-Christians and Christians. To nonbelievers, Paul exemplified God’s grace; if God could extend love to someone like Saul the Pharisee, then no one need fear that their sin could keep them from the salvation message Paul preached. To believers, Paul mirrored his Master and urged others to follow the living example he set before them so that the authenticity of the message the community of Christians delivered would be validated by what the people saw in their lives. Such a witness is summed up by the statement commonly attributed to St. Francis: “Preach the gospel – if necessary, use words.” Finally, the love the Apostle exhibited for those inside and outside of the Church is readily apparent in both the book of Acts and the epistles that are attributed to him.

With a detailed examination of Paul’s apologetic framework as found in the New Testament now finished, a natural question that arises is: how does Paul’s methodology compare with the various apologetic systems that are espoused

today? Does Paul's framework fit completely into one of the existing constructs or is it wholly unique?

#### **4.6 A Look at Current Apologetic Systems**

Broadly speaking, there are five core apologetic systems that are utilized by those defending the faith of Christianity against both its rival faiths and opponents of religion in general. Of course, there are a number of variations and combinations of each system, but distilling the various approaches down to those that exhibit specific and distinct characteristics leaves us with these: classical, evidential, historical/resurrection, experiential, and pre-suppositional (Geisler, 1999A: 41).

The classical approach to defending the Christian faith is sometimes called 'two-step' apologetics because it first utilizes philosophical theistic proofs for the existence of God and once it has established those beachheads with its audience, it then supplies various historical and evidential proof points that speak to the validity of the Bible, the existence of Jesus Christ and His resurrection, and more. Proponents of this method believe an apologist must first supply theistic proofs of a God who can act before a person can move on to acknowledging that Deity's actions. Those espousing the classical method of apologetics include Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, William Paley, Norman Geisler, William Lane Craig, R. C. Sproul, and Ravi Zacharias (Geisler, 1999A: 42).

Evidential apologetics centers on supplying as much evidence as possible in support of the Christian faith. It differs from classical apologetics in that it sees no logical order necessary in supplying its evidence nor views any particular category of evidence (e.g. theistic proofs for God) as superior to any other. The evidential apologist utilizes all forms of substantiation – rational, historical, archaeological, prophetic, and experiential – to convince their prospect of Christianity's validity. In doing so, they tend to overlap with other apologetic

systems. Individuals championing this form of apologetics include Josh McDowell (McDowell, 1999) and William Paley (Paley, 2003) to some degree.

Historical apologetics naturally stresses historical evidence alone in its pursuit of convincing unbelievers of Christianity's truth. It takes the position that history alone – and oftentimes specifically the resurrection of Jesus Christ – is sufficient to bear witness to the gospel. Advocates of historical apologetics include Justin Martyr (Martyr, 1997) and Gary Habermas/Michael Licona (Habermas and Licona, 2004).

The experiential approach to apologetics relies on either general or special religious experiences to validate the claims of Christianity. A direct and meaningful encounter with God supersedes any and all objections that are offered in a contradictory sense to the truth the individual believes they have experienced. Promoters of this form of apologetics include Soren Kierkegaard, Rudolph Bultmann, Karl Barth, and Paul Tillich (Geisler, 1999A: 43).

Lastly, pre-suppositional apologists defend Christianity from a foundation of certain basic presuppositions – presuppositions that differ among the variety of subcategories of pre-suppositional apologetics. For revelational pre-suppositionalists, a person must admit to a God who has revealed Himself in Scripture before any sense can be made out of the world. Rational pre-suppositionalists begin with God but then utilize logical first principles such as the law of non-contradiction to prove that Christianity alone is logically consistent among all competing religions. Systematic pre-suppositionalists build upon the rational approach, but add other criteria such as empirical evidence and existential relevance to demonstrate Christianity's superiority over other systems of belief. Finally, practical pre-suppositionalists use the test of 'livability' as the litmus test of whether a faith system is valid or not. Depending on the classification of the presuppositional method, those promoting this type of apologetics include Cornelius Van Til, Gordon Clark, Edward John Carnell, and Francis Schaeffer (Geisler, 1999A: 43).

#### 4.6.1 A Brief Comparison of Current Apologetic Frameworks and Paul's

With a quick review of current systems now completed, it is now possible to see if any existing apologetic methodology mirrors Paul's. In terms of fitting Paul's framework completely into one of the methodologies just covered, it appears it cannot be done. The evidence has shown that Paul was no classical apologist in the sense that classical apologetics are used today (i.e. first attempt to show why it is plausible a deity exists and then move to prove why the Bible is true). Neither was Paul purely an evidentialist or historical apologist, although he certainly appealed to matters of history with his Jewish audiences and spoke of Christ's resurrection with most everyone. While Paul did indeed relay his supernatural experiences with the risen Christ on various occasions, that is not what he consistently relied on to convert his evangelical prospects. The closest classification that approaches Paul's appears to be the systematic pre-suppositionalist approach, but even that fails to adequately define Paul's framework because the existential portion of the system concentrates on whether a belief meets life's basic needs and does not attempt to marry the message with the messenger as Paul's approach does.

The conclusion, then, would seem to be that Paul's *tria matrus* apologetic framework, in total, stands unique from all other systems that are currently used and espoused.

#### 4.7 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter has been to make an attempt at discovering the apologetic framework of the Apostle Paul by examining the information recorded in the book of Acts as well as the Pauline corpus. The summation of the argument made in this chapter is that the Pauline apologetic is succinctly described in 1 Thess. 1:5, with the framework consisting of three components: a *message* that Paul carried, a *method* that both the Holy Spirit and the Apostle

employed, and a *manner* with which Paul presented himself to both nonbelievers and believers alike. This apologetic structure I classify as *tria martus* or “three-witness apologetics”.

The first part of Paul’s framework was his *message* – a message whose outline, according to the evidence found in the book of Acts and the Pauline corpus, is not explicitly comprised of classical proofs for the existence of God or philosophically styled arguments that make the case for Hebraic monotheism. Instead, Paul appears to agree with a conclusion put forward by Aquinas: “To know in a general and confused way that God exists is implanted in us by nature” (Aquinas, 1920) and by Calvin:

“There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty. . . . there is, as the eminent pagan [Cicero] says, no nation so barbarous, no people so savage, that they have not a deep seated conviction that there is a God” (Calvin, 1599).

Calvin’s words echo what Paul wrote in Romans 1:18-20.

Moreover, Paul’s message was basic – it was not complicated or difficult to ascertain. Paul alludes to the fact that it could not be intellectually challenging when he speaks to the Corinthians about those who responded to his gospel message: “For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble” (1 Cor. 1:26). This is a point he also mentions in his letter to the Romans: “I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish” (Rom. 1:14).

From the evidence contained within the book of Acts and Paul’s letters, it appears that the resurrection of Christ was the primary historical event Paul attempted to utilize in the hopes of moving his audience from faith in the “seen” to faith in the unseen. This is a point agreed upon by both Riddlebarger and Witherington. Even Felix's successor, Festus, when conferring with King

Agrippa about the Apostle, was forced to concede that Paul was incarcerated because of his proclamation "about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive" (Acts 25:19).

The second component of Paul's apologetic framework I label his *method* – a method that relied on the power of the Holy Spirit to work monergistically within the Apostle's audience to overcome the noetic effects of sin from which they suffered and open their heart to receive the things being spoken of by Paul. But there was also a synergistic cooperation with Paul in that the Spirit guided Paul, worked through Paul's declaration of the gospel message, empowered Paul to perform miracles, and also utilized the various rhetorical techniques employed by Paul to convince his audience of the truths that he was proclaiming. Paul believed it was the Holy Spirit who would take an unbeliever from the historical evidences that could be verified via human reason to the unseen spiritual truths that transcended human reason. It was the Spirit who opened their hearts so that they had the will to believe and had a new and right affection for God. He who revealed the truth to their minds, sealed it upon their hearts, and in the end testified to the fact that they were indeed God's children (Rom, 8:16).

In regard to the last part of Paul's framework, his *manner*, there are a number of different dimensions to this component that include the Apostle's living testimony of his own changed life, a willingness to forsake all and become a slave of Christ, his actions and teaching concerning persecution and adversity that would come through preaching the gospel, the example he set for both unbelievers and believers, and the love he demonstrated to the same. Such a witness was a confirmation of the truth of Paul's message that was intended to transform his hearers; as Calvin says, "We have said that the object of regeneration is to bring the life of believers into concord and harmony with the righteousness of God, and so confirm the adoption by which they have been received as sons" (Calvin, 1599).

If we view Paul's apologetic framework from a scholastic-philosophical perspective – using Aristotelian thinking (cf. Geisler, 2002) on the matters of causation – we find that the salvation of a person is the final cause (that for which something comes to be), the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause (that by which something comes to be), Paul himself being the instrumental cause (that through which something comes to be), exemplar cause (that after which something comes to be) and perhaps a formal cause (that of which something comes to be) as well, and his message being the material cause (that out of which something comes to be).

In the next chapter, I will temporarily leave the subject of Paul and his apologetics and attempt to chronicle some of challenges that Postmodernism has brought to bear on Christianity and discuss various positions on whether they actually pose real threats to the gospel message today.

## CHAPTER 5: SOME CHALLENGES FACING CHRISTIANITY IN THE POSTMODERNIST AGE

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to present a number of challenges that face Christianity in the twenty-first century, with particular emphasis being given to philosophical teachings and arguments that are characterized as being postmodernist in nature. There are a total of four issues that will be examined. The first three have been chosen for two reasons. First, on their own, each appears to present a real challenge to the modern apologist who is attempting to convince an unbeliever of Christianity's truth claims. Second, the evidence shows there to be a meaningful downward progression from the first to the third, which culminates in a relegation of the Christian gospel to the realm of opinion and not truth. The fourth challenge has been selected because of recent research that argues it has perhaps become the single biggest obstacle for postmodernists in considering Christianity as a valid belief system.

Within each issue, a number of key philosophers and their work will be considered along with how their thinking is considered by at least one church movement that is known as the "Emerging Church". A short response from those who oppose such teachings and arguments will be presented, but only inasmuch as to gain a proper understanding of where the demarcations exist between the various groups inside and outside the Church. In addition, a brief examination will be undertaken to understand the perceptions and opinions held about the modern Church (defined as the global Church of Jesus Christ in the current century) by those who belong to two distinct generations: "busters" (born between 1965 and 1983) and "mosaics" (born between 1984 and 2002).

To be certain, Postmodernism can be difficult to define, with Deely saying that Postmodernism is a concept in search of a definition (Deely, 1997: 79). The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy agrees and says, "That Postmodernism is indefinable is a truism. However, it can be described as a set of critical, strategic

and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning” (cf. Zalta).

As pointed out in Chapter One, Postmodernism is/was a reaction to Modernism and its assumed certainty of scientific, or objective, efforts to explain reality. Postmodernism has been quite effective at exposing the weaknesses and pretensions of a number of Modernism’s strands. For example, the path to certainty about many things was not as easy as some Modernist thinkers believed. Postmodernism should be praised for demanding that the implications of finitude in all claims of human knowing be recognized (Carson, 2005:103-4). However, this does not mean that Postmodernism has not brought various challenges to Christianity.

The issues of Postmodernism that will be highlighted in this chapter spring from a recognition that reality is not just mirrored in a human understanding of it, but instead is constructed when a person’s mind tries to understand its own unique reality. Because of this, Postmodernism is highly skeptical of explanations which claim to be valid globally (in other words for all cultures and peoples) and instead focuses on relative truths that apply to each person. Adherence to this understanding means that interpretation is everything. Reality only comes into being through a person’s interpretations. Postmodernism in this sense acknowledges that the outcome of each person’s experience will necessarily be fallible and qualified, rather than absolute and universal.

Although one could argue that it would be difficult to get any one group of Christian leaders to agree on the key challenges facing the Church today (especially in the area of evangelism), when the purview is restricted to be that of Postmodernism as noted above, a number of issues rise to the top: relative truth, linguistic relativism, and philosophical pluralism. For the purposes of

this work, I will not attempt to debate the overall merits or drawbacks of Postmodernism. Instead, I will restrict my examination to the question of if these challenges truly present an obstacle to today's evangelist and how each may work to undermine any apologetic defense of the gospel. Each of their roots will be traced and investigated in order to understand the various positions that have been historically held on each up to the present day. When I use the term "postmodernist", it will be used in a personal sense (i.e. a human being) and will refer to an individual who embraces relative truth and language, as well as philosophical pluralism.

Regarding the order in which these issues will be presented: first will be the challenges of relativism versus absolute truth, and the accompanying philosophies of skepticism and agnosticism. As Aristotle notes in the opening line of his work *Metaphysics*, man by nature desires to know. Those of the postmodernist persuasion would likely not doubt his claim, but some do assert that absolute truth – truth that is transcendent over cultures and perspectives – is not something that can be obtained. Instead absolute truth is replaced by perspectivism and interpretations, with all interpretations being dubious at best (Grenz, 1996: 93). Truth, however, is central to the Christian message so naturally a conflict develops between it and the postmodernist position on the matter.

The postmodernist stance on truth naturally leads to issues with language and objective meaning in both oral statements and written works. A demise of the text is the end result of relativistic linguistics with the reader being the ultimate authority of meaning versus the writer of a particular work. Such a thing can lead to an infinite array of interpretations without any conflicting viewpoints being acknowledged for the simple reason that there can only be conflicting interpretations if there is a right interpretation to begin with (Howe, 2004: 4). This, too, causes some (not all) Christians angst as the source of Christian authority necessitates a right interpretation of the Biblical text – an interpretation that applies to all people for all times.

This postmodernist approach to language and objective meaning helps fuel another issue facing Christianity: a dismissal of foundationalism and the logical principles that form the underpinnings of Christian thought, which then leads to pluralism. Postmoderns tend to be adherents of a pluralistic worldview where competing truth claims can peacefully co-exist side by side with no conflicts or logical ramifications being recognized. While not all of Christendom adheres to a strictly exclusivistic position on various core doctrines, conservatives tend to defend basic logical principles such as the law of noncontradiction, identity, and others where matters of faith and truth are concerned.

Whereas the seeming irreconcilable issues noted above have not bothered some considering Christianity, others who are examining the teachings of the Church have become spiritually disillusioned with what they see as irrational positions in matters of faith. In other words, what they want to believe in their heart simply does not make sense in their mind. But perhaps more of a stumbling block to such prospects appears in the form of a perceived hypocrisy in the lives of Christian adherents and a general overall failure of the Church to live a life that represents the teachings of Christ (Kinnamon, 2007: 25). Backing this assertion are studies that have chronicled a noticeable exodus from the traditional Church to other belief systems that appear more spiritual and unencumbering such as neo-pagan style movements such as Wicca (Burroughs, 2008: 11). Faiths like Wicca have a thriving community of followers that pride themselves on their beliefs matching their external actions, which is an authenticity they say cannot be found in conventional Christianity. This last issue – a lack of authenticity in the Church – does not spring from the first three issues that were identified above. Nevertheless, it will be argued it presents a formidable obstacle for today's Christian apologist.

These four issues – relative truth, linguistic relativism, philosophical pluralism, and a supposed mismatch between what Christianity professes vs. how

Christians truly live – will be explored in subsequent sections below in more detail. While I have identified these with Postmodernism, it should be noted that the presence of these issues in the present culture, once confirmed or denied by the evidence that follows, will be addressed regardless of how one chooses to characterize the prevailing philosophy of current times. For example, works by authors such as Tapscott describe a possible new philosophy that has recently come about, which has been molded by the digital or Internet age.

Tapscott does not dismiss Postmodernism, but rather says that many of the ideas he sees in the new generation are “Postmodern concepts . . . whose time had not yet come (Tapscott, 2009: 301). Nowhere in Tapscott’s work is any evidence that the digital generation has returned to a belief in absolute truth or has moved from a philosophical pluralistic stance where matters of faith are concerned. While Tapscott chronicles positive traits (in what he terms as the Net generation) such as a belief in integrity, a willingness to scrutinize truth claims (cf. Tapscott, 80-82), and a desire to develop a meaningful philosophy of life (cf. Tapscott, 301) he does not directly address religious thought where these things are concerned. He does note a profound embrace of personal freedom, tolerance for different thought, and a high value placed on individualism (cf. Tapscott, 74), which in and of themselves are not necessarily bad. However, as will be shown in later sections, such cherished beliefs can feed directly into an adoption of relative truth and pluralism when they are detached from absolute truth and logical thought.

This chapter, therefore, will establish a foundation that will enable us to pursue later enquiries such as:

- How does the postmodernist concept of truth differ from that espoused and presented by the Apostle Paul, which is the personality of focus for this thesis?
- In what ways does Postmodernism’s stance on objective meaning and language differ from that seen in Paul’s writings and life?

- How are the methods of logical argumentation used in evangelistic postmodernist settings today different from those used by Paul in his missionary work?
- Does the current climate of spiritual disillusionment and negative perception of Christianity have any similarities with the first century culture in which Paul lived?

## **5.2 RELATIVISM AND ABSOLUTE TRUTH**

One challenge to Christianity in the postmodernist era is that of relativistic truth, which stands in stark contrast to the transcendent and metaphysical truth that conservative theologians say is proclaimed in the Bible. In fact, it could be argued that this particular issue serves as the foundation from which all other key objections between Postmodernism and New Testament Christianity arise. If absolute truth is indeed unknowable, then it is natural that questions of linguistic objectivity and logical thought occur, which then lead to what some may find to be a confusing climate that offers no sense of stability especially in matters of spirituality because there is no way to adjudicate between different truth claims.

It is helpful to first briefly examine the viewpoints of truth that were held through key historical periods and see how its concept has changed over the centuries into what is now seen in the postmodernist period.

### **5.2.1 Truth in the Enlightenment**

From Augustine to the Reformation, the intellectual aspects of Western civilization and the concept of truth were dominated by theologians. Beginning with the Renaissance (a French term meaning 'rebirth' or 'revival') periods of the 14<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, thinkers began to elevate humankind to the center of reality, with one other noted trait being the rejection of Aristotelian thought in favor of Platonism and mysticism, which is not unlike the postmodernist stance

seen today (Grenz, 1996: 58). But the Enlightenment – also sometimes referred to as the Age of Reason and pegged by historians as developing between 1600 and 1800 – more fully replaced the intellectualism of theology that started in the Renaissance with that of humanity on the stage of human history.

Enlightenment thinkers attributed much greater intellectual prowess and moral abilities to humans than had prior history's theologians. The famous statement commonly attributed to Anselm – "I believe in order that I may understand" (Geirsson, 1998: 109) – was discarded and replaced with "I believe what I can understand". The Enlightenment's goal was to elevate reason over what it considered to be superstition, with the end result being that pure reason replaced revelation as the arbiter of truth.

The Enlightenment was in a way the totalitarian imposition of the scientific model of rationality upon all aspects of truth and claimed that only scientific data could be objectively understood, defined, and defended. It left Western culture with little more than a materialist worldview and ended up transforming the view of humankind in relation to itself and knowledge (Mohler, 2005: 56).

Enlightenment thinkers no longer understood the world as a cosmos in which humans enjoyed special status. They questioned the validity of doctrine itself and argued that theological doctrine and its accompanying truth claims only served to divide people, which is something that postmodernist thinkers today also assert (Grenz, 1996: 63). The official inaugurating philosopher of the revolution that ended up replacing revelation with reason, whether he meant to or not, was Rene Descartes.

Descartes, a mathematician, sought truth outside the realm of his beloved mathematics that was as certain as the discipline he practiced for so long. His philosophical approach took the form of methodological doubt and began from the observation that, while he could not be certain anything else was truth, he could not doubt the fact that he was doubting. This realization evoked his

famous conclusion *cogito ergo sum* – “I think, therefore I am.” Stating his deduction in a lengthier manner, Descartes wrote: “Since this truth, I think, therefore I am, was so firm and assured that all the most extravagant suppositions of the skeptics were unable to shake it, I judged that I could safely accept it as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking” (Descartes, 1960: 24).

Religious truth was not abandoned during this period, but rather two distinct types of truth emerged: natural and revealed. Natural religious truth involved a set of foundational truths (mainly the existence of God and embodied moral laws) that all humans could discern with reason. Revealed truth did not fare as well and generally came under attack with the era spawning Deism, which ultimately mandated that any concept of revealed religious truth be discarded. “Nature’s God” became the deity of the Enlightenment, which directly opposed the God of the Bible. A natural outworking of this was that the supernatural was submerged in the natural – a characteristic that would help drive the rejection of Enlightenment and Modern principles for that of Postmodernism. Skepticism, religious relativism, and a rejection of objective truth naturally gained ground during this period with philosophers like David Hume (1711-76) helping energize the trend.

Another key principle to emerge during this time with respect to truth that would carry over to present day Postmodernism was autonomy. The individual testing of all claims to authority including those of the Church was the norm. However, this challenge and exaltation of the self did not result in lawlessness during the Enlightenment; instead, each person was still encouraged to follow the natural law of God that society still believed was in humanity. The Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant, who believed in God via the witness of the starry host above and the moral law within, said: “‘Have courage to use your own reason’ – that is the motto of enlightenment” (Kant, 1959: 85). The centrality of the autonomous self became the chief identifying characteristic of the merging Modern era, and with it came a more crystallized form of individualistic truth.

## 5.2.2 Truth in Modernity

If one were to look at human periods of history like a family tree, the Renaissance was Modernism's grandmother with the Enlightenment being its mother. As to when Modernism officially begin, some credit Immanuel Kant with initiating the era via his work *The Critique of Pure Reason*, which appeared in 1781. Key elements of Modernism with respect to truth included a focus on the powers of human reason and the emphasis on sense experience.

Arguably, the greatest philosopher of modernity was indeed Kant, who had been awakened from his dogmatic slumbers by David Hume (so claimed Kant). Hume had impressed Kant with his argument that we have no actual experience of causation, then how can theistic arguments like the cosmological argument carry any weight? Thus, Kant became agnostic with respect to truth and God, and envisioned truth being very compartmentalized into the phenomenal and noumenal realms, with facts and objective truth being present in the former and opinion and subjectivity being found in the latter. To put his position in everyday terms, one might phrase it: "you cannot get there [truth about God] from here [the phenomenal world]". In Kant's own words, he says: "I have therefore found it necessary to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith" (Kant, 1929: 29).

As will be seen in upcoming chapters, Kant's assertion that humanity, living in the natural world, cannot obtain truth concerning God and His attributes directly undercuts Paul's arguments in the first chapter of Romans where he makes plain that natural humanity has no *apologia* when it comes to not knowing God – that God can be known via His effects. Clearly either Kant is right and Paul is wrong or Paul is correct and Modernism's chief spokesman is mistaken. Again, these positions will be more fully developed in upcoming chapters.

In addition to constructing what appeared to be an impregnable wall between truth in the natural world and truth about God, Kant envisioned the thinking self in a sense 'creating' the world – that is the world of a person's own knowledge. This ramification of this contribution is still felt today in Postmodernism and the focus of philosophical reflection ever since has been this world-creating self (Grenz, 1996: 79).

### **5.2.3 Truth in Postmodernity**

According to some historians and philosophers such as Doug Groothuis, the Modern era came to an end when the Pruitt-Igoe housing project was brought down by dynamite on July 15, 1972 in St. Louis, MS. To some observers, the housing development symbolized a rational plan of perfect living; one that represented rationalism in action. However, the project was eventually declared unlivable and thus put an end to the idea that Modernity offered any real existential hope to humanity – a thought we will cover in more detail in an upcoming section (Groothuis, 2000: 27).

Whereas a particular, authoritative philosophical voice rose to the top in the Enlightenment and Modern periods to speak on the topic of truth, the postmodernist age sports a plethora of authoritative personalities that offer viewpoints on the matter of truth. That said, there are still agreements that emerge between these competing authorities that can be teased out. For example, one characteristic regarding truth that carried over from Modernity to Postmodernity was a rejection of theistic belief – an attitude that either discarded theism overtly or affirmed agnosticism. None of the key postmodernist thinkers such as Nietzsche, Rorty, Lyotard, Derrida, or Foucault affirmed a belief in a personal deity. Building upon the concept of atheism, the focus on the self, and the skepticism toward truth in matters relating to the knowledge of God, Postmodernism from a philosophical standpoint began to craft a reinterpretation of what knowledge is and what counts as knowledge (Moreland, 2005: 79). In that sense, Postmodernism developed an intellectual

mood and series of cultural expressions that call into question not only the aspect of truth, but the ideals, principles, and values that formed the foundation of the Modern mind-set (Grenz, 1996: 8).

Whereas Kant marked the philosophical transition from the Enlightenment to Modernity, Frederick Nietzsche may symbolize the shift from Modernism to Postmodernism, with his view of truth being anything but kind to the Christian concept (Groothuis, 2000: 37). As the patron saint of postmodernist philosophy, Nietzsche held to 'perspectivism' – that all knowledge is a matter of perspective, interpretation, with all interpretations ultimately ending up as lies. Nietzsche argued that what we commonly accept as human knowledge is in fact merely a self-contained set of illusions. He viewed truth as a function of the language a person employs and thus believed that truth existed only within specific linguistic contexts. Nietzsche claimed we have no access to reality whatsoever, a view which makes him a nihilist. The world, according to Nietzsche, is a work of art that is continually being created and recreated - a web of illusion that in a sense is self-creating and gives birth to itself.

Regarding truth, Nietzsche wrote: "What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms ... truths are illusions ... coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins" (Nietzsche, 1976: 46-47). If truths are illusions, then how does humankind use the concept? Nietzsche argued that our understanding of truth does not originate in our wanting to go into the transcendent realm, but from the immediacy of the "will to power". His birthing of the "death of God" movement gave way to a body of primitive instincts aimed at self-preservation and self-promotion – the will to power, which he described as the desire to perfect and transcend the self through the exercise of personal creative power rather than dependence on anything external. Nothing undergirds values except the will of the person who holds them, with things only having the value we give them. In essence the person does the creating rather than a

transcendental Being like God (Grenz, 1996:90-92). This last concept is unlike what Kant proposed years before.

Taking a cue from Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, who has been called the greatest of Nietzsche's disciples and his truest twentieth century successor, drew on his mentor's writings to create what he termed the "will to knowledge". After 1968, Foucault, who relished the title "archaeologist of knowledge", arrived at a turning in his studies in 1968 and made his central preoccupation power. He believed that Western society and its scholars had for the past three centuries made a number of fundamental errors, which included (1) that an objective body of knowledge exists and is waiting to be discovered, (2) that they actually possess such knowledge and that it is neutral or value-free, and (3) that the pursuit of knowledge benefits all humankind rather than just a specific class (Wolin, 1988: 186).

As stated above, Foucault said that knowledge and truth are a "will to knowledge" (echoing Nietzsche's will to power) that arbitrarily establishes its own truth. Knowledge is linked to power because of its connection to "discourse" – knowledge is related to what he calls a "discursive formation". Foucault states: "I think that, instead of trying to find out what truth, as opposed to error, is, it might be more interesting to take up the program posed by Nietzsche: how is it that, in our societies, 'the truth' has been given this value, thus placing us absolutely under its thrall" (Foucault, 1995: 45).

Although not echoing Foucault's assertion that truth is just a will to knowledge, Richard Rorty stands alongside Foucault against the concept of absolute truth and champions relativism instead. Richard Rorty, a pragmatist, follows his philosophical predecessor John Dewey when he asserts that the truth is what one's peers let one get away with (Rorty, 1979: 176).

Rorty and other pragmatists propose a nonrepresentationalist, rather than a representationalist understanding of truth. The latter assigns a certain

objectivity not only to the world but also to human language, while the former denies that language has the capability to represent the world in this manner. Arguing against a correspondence view of truth, Rorty instead embraces a coherence stance (as do others in history such as Spinoza, Leibniz, Hegel, Bradley, etc.) and charges that correspondence is a “spectator theory of knowledge” and dismisses it as simply unworkable. He says, “Truth cannot be out there – cannot exist independently of the human mind – because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. . . . Only descriptions . . . can be true and false” (Rorty, 1989: 4-5).

If Rorty is correct and statements are true insofar as they cohere, then it is logical to see that truth becomes merely something that is useful and nothing more. If a statement does not make any real difference, then it must not be true, with perhaps the only exception being a truth that is true for an individual person in a particular social setting. Rorty admits that in the end truth becomes in essence truth for us. In the end, there is no difference in truth that ought to be and truth that is.

For Rorty, there is also no metaphysical difference between morality and science – each has truth only insofar as truth “works”. One interesting observation is that Rorty rejects Descartes’ and Modernism’s view of the self and instead argues that an individual and truth are placed squarely in a social context. He argues for an “ethnocentric” view of the justification of truth claims and that one cannot go beyond one’s own society’s procedures of justification. This claim serves as a key label for the postmodernist movement that views community and culture as the great arbiter of what is true and what is false.

This theme of community being the decision maker of truth versus any transcendental or global authority can also be found in the writings of another key figure of Postmodernity, Jean-Francois Lyotard. In 1979, Postmodernism became a fixture on the intellectual landscape when Lyotard delivered his work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, which contained key

statements on the topic of truth. Writing a report on knowledge commissioned by the government of Quebec, Lyotard opened his analysis with the statement: "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodernism as incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1979: xxiv).

Postmodern thinkers believe that myths are more than just stories from primitive cultures; they hold that they embody the central core of a culture's values and beliefs. Each society is bound by these myths, which they term 'narratives', but Lyotard asserts that these narratives exercise a force apart from argumentation and proof, and that truth is not contained in them (Lyotard, 1979: 27). Such assertions stand in opposition to any claim of overarching, grand truths that apply to all people for all time. Instead all that is left are *les petites histoires*, the little stories.

Postmoderns such as Lyotard are no longer confident that any transcendent Mind lies behind the world, and so with it goes the thought of transcendent truth and harmony of thought. But Lyotard believes this is good because the postmodernist condition fosters invention, and invention is always born of dissension and not consensus (Grenz, 1996: 49).

Areas such as religion are not the only target of Lyotard's thinking - he also believes that Postmodernism marks the end of science as was previously defined in the Enlightenment and Modernity eras. Like any other pursuer of truth, science cannot expel myth from knowledge and turns toward narratives to legitimize its own pursuits, with the goal really being more performativity than truth (Lyotard, 1979: 29).

There are other voices besides those previously mentioned that have contributed to the postmodernist view of truth. For example, Johann Gottlieb Fichte dismissed the Kantian notion of the noumenal realm and stated that such a thing no longer carries any philosophical significance - a claim that further removes God from the realm of truth. What Fichte substituted in the place of

absolute truth was the role of the imagination, with it holding the potential of liberating humankind from a single way of understanding the world. The imagination opens up the possibility of describing objects using a variety of “intellectual frameworks” and allows people to create different worlds for each person – a theme that continues to repeat itself in the postmodernist era (Grenz, 1996: 88).

In the end, the postmodernist understanding of knowledge and view of truth boils down to three foundational assumptions. First: all explanations of reality are constructions that are useful but not objectively true – they are neither metaphysical in nature nor transcendental. All claims to truth and even truth itself are socially conditioned and do not exist outside of the community that establishes them. Second: people cannot step outside their constructions of reality, so no one person can make a claim that is absolute and binding upon anyone else but themselves. Third and finally: the end result of the previous two assumptions is that the postmodernist person simply must arrive at a conclusion that no truth can be affirmed.

#### **5.2.4 Truth in the Emerging Church Movement**

The Emerging Church (sometimes referred to as “emergent” although there are those who object to the two being used as synonyms) is a Christian movement that began in the late twentieth century and is characterized by a desire to minister to the current generation of both believers and unbelievers by embracing what it considers to be a fresh approach to evangelism in lieu of a Western, commercialized brand of Christianity (McLaren, 2001: xi). Some have proclaimed the Emerging Church officially dead (cf. Bradley), but fairly recent works published in 2010 by Emerging Church leaders such as McLaren appear to indicate the movement is alive and well. Gibbs and Bolger describe the Emerging Church in this manner:

“Emerging churches are not young adult services, Gen-X churches, churches-within-a-church, seeker churches, purpose-driven or new

paradigm churches, fundamentalist churches, or even evangelical churches. They are a new expression of church. The three core practices are identifying with the life of Jesus, transforming secular space, and commitment to community as a way of life. These practices are expressed in or lead to the other six: welcoming the stranger, serving with generosity, participating as producers, creating as created beings, leading as a body, and taking part in spiritual activities" (Gibbs and Bolger, 2005: 235).

It is doubtful if the practices described above by Gibbs and Bolger in their definition of the Emergent Church would be criticized by any Christian body of believers. In like manner, DeYoung and Cluck laud the Emergent Church for some of its desires: "(The Emergents) have many good deeds. They want to be relevant. They want to reach out. They want to be authentic. They want to include the marginalized. They want to be kingdom disciples. They want community and life transformation" (DeYoung and Cluck, 2008: 247). As with the statements made by Gibbs and Bolger, it is hard not to applaud what DeYoung and Cluck say about the overall aspirations of the Emerging Church.

However, for the purposes of this work, I am primarily concerned with the question of whether the Emergent Church has embraced the concepts of relative truth, linguistic relativism, and philosophical pluralism. Before we begin an attempt at answering that question, it should be noted that it is difficult (if not impossible) to characterize all those identifying themselves with the Emergent Church as holding to a rigidly defined, one dimensional set of beliefs.

Therefore, care should be taken so as to not broadly paint all in the Emergent Church a certain way.

Nevertheless, the Emergent Church does have key figures such as Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, James Smith, Tony Jones, and Doug Pagitt. These leaders appear in each others' churches as well as on the same conference platforms, and endorse each other in their books. Those in the movement recognize and refer to them as leaders, and from these leaders, a body of teaching and positions on truth, language, and a stance on pluralism have materialized. While it cannot be said that each emergent leader subscribes to every tenet of

these teachings, the question we have before us is, what does the evidence reveal in regard to the Emerging Church's positions in these areas?

Emphasis in the Emerging Church is placed on tradition and mystery, while doctrines and propositional truth are sometimes not considered as important. Some Emerging Church pastors and spokesmen such as Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, and James Smith in some ways see the concept of truth as do the postmodernist philosophers such as Foucault and others. These leaders see Postmodernism as a fresh wind of the Spirit sent to revitalize the dry bones of the Church.

According to James Smith, Christians should find postmodernist philosophers like Lyotard an ally. He believes the orthodox Christian faith requires that all believers stop believing in objective truth. Lyotard, says Smith, defines metanarratives as appeals to any particular language game and thus no guarantee of universal truth can be had. In place of metanarratives, Smith substitutes general narratives and the concept of myth, which he defines not as fables but rather as religious, confessional status of a truth, which he readily acknowledges is not generally how the world defines the concept (Smith, 2006: 64-67). Instead, Smith argues along the same lines as C. S. Lewis when distinguishing between myth and narrative – our imagination is a truth-bearing faculty that communicates not via cold logical syllogisms or propositions, but instead via experiences that allow us to believe in something concrete which would otherwise only be understood as abstractions (Lewis, 1970: 67).

Smith upholds Lyotard's assertion that all knowledge is grounded in narrative or myth holding that Lyotard relativizes secular philosophy's claim to autonomy and in doing so grants the legitimacy of a philosophy that he believes ultimately can be grounded in the Christian faith. Smith applauds Lyotard's critique of metanarratives and affirms his belief that no philosophy – indeed, no knowledge or supposed truth – is untainted by prejudice or faith commitments. But far from this being a bad thing, Smith feels that this has

'leveled the playing field' and new opportunities to voice a Christian philosophy have been created (Smith, 2006: 73).

Anticipating opposition on his point above from conservative Christian scholars who may argue why anyone should believe a claim for truth given his position on the matter, Smith concedes that he, along with Lyotard, does recognize that a "problem of legitimation" will occur in terms of adjudicating between competing truth claims. In the end, Smith agrees with Lyotard and states that any criteria that determine what constitutes evidence or proof in matters of truth must be game relative: they will function as rules only for those who share the same paradigm or participate in the same language game. He also acknowledges that the incommensurability of language games means that there is a plurality of logics that precludes any demonstrative appeal to a common reason (Smith, 2006: 70). Smith says, "We can't know that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself; the best we can do is believe. Why? Because to know would mean being certain. But this isn't a bad thing: quite the contrary, it is liberating and just" (Smith, 2006: 119).

Agreeing with Smith on this point are emergents J. Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh who affirm that certainty is not possible if one acquiesces to the Emerging Church thought process. Truth, they say, cannot be known: "Such an aspiration, however, is epistemologically impossible to realize. Indeed, it rests upon the conviction that a final, universally true perspective can be achieved" (Middleton and Walsh, 1995: 168).

Emergent leader Tony Jones deflects the question on absolute vs. relative truth by saying, "Emergent doesn't have a position on absolute truth, or on anything for that matter. Do you show up at a dinner party with your neighbors and ask, 'What's this dinner party's position on absolute truth?' No, you don't, because it's a nonsensical question" (Jones, 2005). McLaren agrees with Jones and states: "Arguments that pit absolutism versus relativism, and objectivism versus

subjectivism, prove meaningless or absurd to postmodern people” (McLaren, 2004: 43).

McLaren also says the view of truth must change for people in the Postmodern culture and links it to theological understanding:

“But for me . . . opposing it [Postmodernism] is as futile as opposing the English language. It’s here. It’s reality. It’s the future. . . . It’s the way my generation processes every other fact on the event horizon . . . Postmodernism is the intellectual boundary between the old world and the other side. Why is it so important? Because when your view of truth is changed, when your confidence in the human ability to know truth in any objective way is revolutionized, then everything changes. That includes theology” (McLaren, 2003A: 60).

A final point worth nothing is that like Rorty and Lyotard, Smith also asserts that science itself is nothing more than a story – a narrative – and that it is not objectively true, with the end result being that every scientist becomes a believer in a sense (Smith, 2006: 68). Agreeing with Lyotard, Smith says that science makes false appeals to universal, rational, scientific criteria as though they were divorced from any particular myth or narrative, and this simply cannot be. Therefore science is no better than religion as far as its truth claims are concerned.

### **5.2.5 Truth in Conservative Evangelicalism**

The concept of truth in conservative evangelical circles appears to differ from that espoused by some Emerging Church leaders and postmodernist thinkers. Truth takes on a much more propositional form and assumes the likeness of something that is both transcendent and objective as opposed to being communal and prejudiced.

To conservative Christian apologists, the truth or falsity of entertained propositions is absolute and immutable, but they recognize that the correctness of the judgments individuals make about them is relative and mutable. The

absoluteness of truth does not imply the absoluteness of our human knowledge. The failure to make this distinction, say these apologists, leads to such unguarded and incorrect statements as 'this may be true for you but it is not true for me, and that is all there is to it' in matters that supersede mere taste and option (e.g. one person likes broccoli and another does not). Regardless of whether we know a particular fact or not, truth remains in place waiting to be discovered, not created. Conservatives cite examples: atoms, for instance, were once thought to be indivisible, but now the world at large knows better. The proposition itself, as entertained by the mind, was always false and did not become false in the twentieth century because the correct judgment about it was finally made (Adler, 1990: 12-13). Truth exists whether someone knows a particular reality or not – the number of dust particles on the moon or the number of hairs on a person's head. But again, to these thinkers, metaphysical objectivity is compatible with epistemological subjectivity. In other words, there can be different levels of epistemic strength for a claim, but that does not affect its metaphysical nature.

In contrast to Rorty's coherence view of truth, truth to conservative scholars is that which corresponds to reality and something that applies to all people, in all places, for all time. Truth is not what works, what coheres, what was intended, what is comprehensive, what is existentially relevant, what feels good, or what a particular communal group of people uphold something to be (Geisler, 1999B: 741-742). Instead, truth is correspondent in nature and matches its objects; it is simply telling it like it is. Christian philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas assert that truth is immutable, but only insofar as it applies to the divine intellect of God; truth as human beings know it is different in that it can change from falsity to truth and is therefore mutable in that regard (Aquinas, 1990: 147). Conservative thinkers believe that Rorty's stance on truth being simply coherence fails, and point out that a conspiracy can agree on a set of lies that cohere with one another, but that does not make them true.

Conservative theologians not only reject the postmodernist philosophers' definition of truth, but they believe that such an approach is anemic in matters of evangelism. Doug Groothuis chides Christians who embrace such thinking and points out what he believes to be flaws in arguments such as those advanced by Phillip Kenneson who asserts that a Christian's duty is to present the gospel without any reliance on objective truth at all. According to Kenneson, Christians are to "persuade others to accept our beliefs because if they believe what we believe, they will see what we see; and the facts to which we point in order to support our interpretations will be as obvious to them as they are to us" (Kenneson, 1995: 164). This is not an apologetic, says Groothuis, but instead a tautology. If you believe what we believe, you will, in fact, believe what we believe. Any appeal to community tradition simply begs the question of the truthfulness or falsity of the traditions themselves (Groothuis, 2000: 150).

Metaphysical truth trumps epistemic truth in the view of conservative evangelicalism because in its mind, you cannot have a true story without a transcendental Storyteller and if the story is not objectively true, then it becomes merely one of many tales told by the errant narrators of Postmodernity. The key question asked by these scholars is why, then, should anyone believe in anything?

Conservative voices also point out what they consider to be inconsistencies in the messages offered by the postmodernist philosophers such as Foucault. As an example, they say if Foucault really believed that truth and knowledge were simply power tools exercised by those wishing to rule over others, then Foucault would neither write nor attempt communicating what he believes to be the truth. How could he speak such ideas without using words and attempting to persuade as well? Was he not simply exerting his authority and considerable power over his readers? If he really believed his own philosophy, why did he not then remain silent? (Ewing, 2007: 6-7).

### 5.2.6 Summary

Whereas the concept of truth was once dominated in early centuries by theologians, it was redefined by the thinkers of the Renaissance, Enlightenment, Modern, and Postmodern eras to be something that was either compartmentalized (e.g. science versus faith in Modernity) or rejected outright as being unknowable. The fear of conservative Christian thinkers is that such an end result renders the Christian gospel as nothing more than a competing narrative among a sea of other voices where no means of mediation can be found between rival claims. Whereas the leaders of the Emerging Church do not appear concerned over such a situation, but instead embrace the idea of metanarratives not being relevant or possible, conservative scholars are concerned that the eviction of objective and transcendent truth leads to a type of vampirism that drains the foundation of power away from the gospel's message leaving it both unappealing and unreasonable.

## 5.3 LANGUAGE AND OBJECTIVE MEANING

Conservative evangelical Christians believe that truth is something that can be communicated via language and the written word, with the Bible being God's truth written down in human words. That being the case, a precondition for effective evangelism, they say, is that finite human language must be capable of meaningfully and objectively expressing the nature of the infinite God of Christian theism and His plan of salvation. Further, they hold that language is capable of not only effectively and correctly communicating God's special revelation, but His general revelation as well (Geisler, 2002: 137).

This position is challenged by some postmodernist thinkers who hold that language cannot measure up to the aforementioned standards that evangelicals demand. As will be shown, Postmodernism asserts that there is no neutral observation where language is concerned and so it becomes at its core a

hermeneutical philosophy or a philosophy of hermeneutics – a hermeneutic perspectivism.

A possible statement regarding the postmodernist position on objectivity and language can be generally stated as follows:

1. Everyone comes to the world with his own framework of understanding.
2. No particular framework of understanding is universally valid.
3. But universal validity is precisely what is implied in the notion of objectivity.
4. Therefore no interpreter can be objective in interpretation.
5. But if no interpreter can be objective then no interpretation is universally valid.
6. But if no interpretation is universally valid then the concept of a correct interpretation is at best relative or at worst empty.
7. Since there is no such thing as a correct interpretation there is no means of adjudicating between interpretations.
8. In fact, the very idea of adjudicating between interpretations is at best relative and at worst empty (Howe, 2004: 458).

These general themes can be found in nearly all widely-read postmodernist philosophers and the predecessors that set the stage for them who either overtly or subtly challenge the evangelical Christian position of language being capable of accurately reflecting an objective view of reality – one that applies globally to all peoples. We will now briefly trace the theory of linguistic relativism by examining the teachings of various key philosophers up to the current era who support the concept.

### 5.3.1 Saussure on Language and Objectivity

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand Saussure's work *Course in General Linguistics* was the forerunner of modern conventionalism and is still a standard in the field today. His contribution to the theory of language was that the individual author was not seen as the origin or locus of meaning. Such a stance makes Saussure the father of structuralism, which says that an objective, universal cultural system "structures" our mental processes and that this structure is evident in both human language and social institutions (Grenz, 1996: 117). His theory overturned the modern meaning of texts and of knowing itself – the author of the text disappears behind the structures of language with the end result being that there is no single genius behind a work. And if that is true, then the reader suddenly assumes preeminence with respect to what an actual work means – a teaching that was to become front and center in the postmodernist position on language and objectivity.

For Saussure, each linguistic system, along with its signs, is determined by social conventionalism with language being autonomous. If it is a social phenomenon that all is arbitrary, then we have no reason to explain why linguistic expressions mean what they do. Realizing that such a position may have self-defeating consequences, structuralists such as Saussure still say that some type of systematic knowledge is possible, but acknowledge that the impossibility of true knowing and meaning is ever present (Grenz, 1996: 121).

### 5.3.2 Wittgenstein on Language and Objectivity

Ludwig Wittgenstein built upon Saussure's work and helped lay the foundation for what Postmodernism would use for its position on language and objectivity. He believed that all words or linguistic signifiers are embedded in what he called "language games". A language game is something that contains a system of rules which governs the way words are used within a particular context, much like chess and how the individual game pieces can be moved

about the board. In the end, Wittgenstein held that the various languages color and alter the way we experience the world, and taught that language disguises thought; so much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it (Vanhoozer, 2005: 103).

Wittgenstein was influential in the rise of logical positivism, a stance that adheres to the belief that if a statement is not a tautology or an empirically verifiable claim, then it is meaningless and should be discarded. Certain matters, said Wittgenstein, defy words and “what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence” (Wittgenstein, 1961: 39). Hence, religious language is placed in the realm of the inexpressible. As previously stated, language has a single purpose in Wittgenstein’s mind – language games – something that contains its own rules and is a closed system. This is a key point to understand because to adopt the concept of language games is to take an important step toward rejecting the idea of objective reality. Moreover, the concept is closely linked with the abandonment of the correspondent view of truth because language is nothing more than a social phenomenon and acquires its meaning in social interaction and not in anything that is objectively true in the correspondent sense (Grenz, 1996: 113).

Wittgenstein’s position contradicted previous positions of language being primarily concerned with stating truth (something we touched on earlier), which in turn is a function of describing reality, representing the world, or recording a series of events. Meaning has no ostensive reference and is not a matter of indicating objects or states of affairs. Hence truth is not a correspondence relation in which language (and thought) accurately reflects, mirrors, or pictures reality. Univocal and analogical uses of language are discarded in Wittgenstein’s thought process, with the equivocal view of language being embraced instead. Language and objective meaning are more of a reflection of family resemblances and changing experience than anything that is objective and unchanging – in essence, pictures. The shift from the word to the image has caused what Jacques Ellul calls “the humiliation of the word”

(Ellul, 1985). Everything can mean anything, so in the end everything means nothing.

In the end, Wittgenstein believed that religious beliefs and language may have a commissive force – that is, they help orient our lives – but, they are not informative about reality and certainly have no power to inform about God.

### **5.3.3 Nietzsche on Language and Objectivity**

One of Postmodernism's high priests of the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' was Frederick Nietzsche. For him, everything was suspect, especially the written word. Nietzsche held that language does not distort reality, but that it is reality. By constructing an independent world, language creates truth through its metaphors and anthropomorphisms. Nietzsche claimed that there are no facts, but only interpretations created according to one's particular need to enhance one's life – the doctrine that was seen in the previous section on truth: "the will to power." There is no true world, only a perspectival appearance whose origin lies in us, which is a concept that Postmodernism would later embrace (Nietzsche, 1967: 14-15).

Nietzsche was a precursor to the postmodernist deconstructionists like Derrida. Following his lead, they would conclude that there is no such thing as a thing in itself; everything is simply a mask for some other thing and every "other thing" turns out to be a mask as well, arriving at the final destination where no language is found to be meaningful, contains any true objectivity, or has a grounding in reality. Religion, and Christianity in particular, was a target of Nietzsche who wrote: "In Christianity, neither morality nor religion has even a single point of contact with reality" (Nietzsche, 1976: 581).

### 5.3.4 Derrida on Language and Objectivity

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida leans on Saussure's observation and becomes Nietzsche's most important modern day interpreter when he says that a linguistic signifier (e.g. a word) does not possess a fixed meaning within itself but derives its meaning from its relations within the language system (Saussure, 1959: 120). Derrida attacked language's 'logocentrism' denying that language has a fixed meaning connected to a fixed reality or that it unveils definitive and objective truth or meaning. He states there is a distinction between speech and writing, with speech allowing the possibility of a direct contact with truth, but not writing – it has no such immediate connection (Grenz, 1996: 141). Speech has immediacy but writing implies a disengagement from that immediacy and loss of fact in the end.

Logocentrism refers to the philosophical method that looks to the *logos*, the word, or language – especially written language – as the carrier of meaning. It is connected to what Derrida calls the "metaphysics of presence" – an assumption that there is at the foundation of our language a "presence" of being or an essence that we can come to know.

Derrida mainly concerns himself with the question of meaning and states that in the end language is merely self-referential. Meaning is never static, never given once-for-all; instead it changes over time and with changing contexts. For this reason, humankind must continually defer or postpone its tendency to attribute meaning. Through language and concepts we impose the sense of objective meaning on the flux of experience, with Derrida speaking of meanings that are endlessly deferred (Vanhooser, 2005: 98). In fact, Derrida's concept of *differance* (not difference), refers to not only differing but also deferring. He writes, "The absence of a transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of significations infinitely" (Derrida, 1978: 280).

With respect to written text, Derrida is a deconstructionalist. Deconstruction is a form of hermeneutics and conventionalism that asserts there is no perfect reference or one-to-one correspondence between words and the meanings they confer. To deconstruct something is to take it apart, but after deconstructing a particular text, Derrida charges the reader with the task of reconstructing the text to make it meaningful to themselves because meaning is ultimately untransferrable between a writer and reader in Derrida's world. Derrida argues that all of us interpret our world on the basis of language. Deconstructionalists like Derrida reject Saussure's structuralism and say that meaning is not inherent in the text itself, but emerges only as the interpreter enters into dialogue with the text. At its very heart, deconstruction concerns language. It involves the use of certain philosophical or philological assumptions to launch an assault on logocentrism, understood as the assumption that something lies beyond our system of linguistic signs to which a written work can refer or substantiate its claim to be an authentic statement (Grenz, 1996: 148).

No written work is held static by a metaphysical anchor says Derrida, his famous quote punctuating this point being: *Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*: "there is nothing outside the text" (Derrida, 1976: 158). For Derrida, there is no "outside the text" - writing is undermined and is not really a deposit of lived experiences. The text is fluid with it having no fixed origin, identity, or end. Each act of reading the text is a preface to the next, with the end result being that we are left with solely the act of interpretation - and interpretation becomes unqualified free play divested of ontological anchors (Grenz, 1996: 146). This naturally leads to a loss of objectivity in truth where a written work is concerned, which may be why Derrida once said: "I don't know, I must believe" (Derrida, 1993: 155). Derrida calls for an abandonment of what he termed "onto-theology", the attempt to establish ontological descriptions of reality and the "metaphysics of presence", which conveys the idea that transcendence is present in reality. For him, there is no transcendental nature to language, objectivity, truth, and meaning.

### 5.3.5 Foucault on Language and Objectivity

Nietzsche's views on the subject of language and objectivity can be found interlaced in the writings of Foucault. Whereas Francis Bacon had cried "Knowledge is power", Foucault transforms this statement into the exercise of power over others in the form of violence with language being simply a tool used for control and domination. Foucault's postmodernist axiom is "Power is knowledge".

Foucault states that the power of knowledge reveals itself in a discourse through which it arbitrarily, and for its own purposes, engages in the invention of truth with language being used as its communication vehicle. In this fashion knowledge produces our reality, with an end result not only being the undermining of traditional Christian thought but every other discipline as well including science (Foucault, 1977: 194). This not only undermines conservative Christian thought but also science as being objective. Modern scholarship and science assumes that knowledge and language is neutral, but these proponents remain blind to the will to power that pervades their endeavors.

Foucault insists there is no firm foundation and no original or transcendental "signified" to which all "signifiers" can ultimately refer. He moves beyond structuralism to post-structuralism, although he never uses the term and proposes a differentiation between "language" and "discourse". Language recognizes itself as the world; discourse, in contrast, sees itself as representing the world. The self is no longer viewed as the ultimate source and ground for language; to the contrary, we are now coming to see that the self is constituted in and through language (Grenz, 1996: 130).

For Foucault, truth and anything communicated via language is merely political in most respects and needs to be unmasked. He writes: "Power produces knowledge . . . Power and knowledge directly imply one another . . . There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor

any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault, 1977: 27-28). It is not hard to see shades of Nietzsche and his attitude toward religion – that the priesthood is nothing more than vehicles for control over people.

History, says Foucault, is also a will to knowledge and is used as another channel of manipulation to control others. Foucault believed the center of anthropology was history and he found the discipline of history to be suspect at its very core. Historical narratives invariably exclude certain objects while privileging others, or as some contemporary pundits of history might say, "history is written by the winners". History, in short, has no meaning to Foucault – it is an anti-theory – a false production of the truth. All works are socially produced and are not objective – all histories are fictions – what Foucault calls "effective history", which introduces discontinuity into our frame of reference and deprives us of the reassuring stability of life and what is true (Grenz, 1996: 136-138).

This is why Foucault, following Nietzsche, described his method in intellectual history as 'genealogy' or 'archaeology' whose task is to uncover the secret submerged biases and prejudices that go into shaping what is called the truth. There is no claim to truth that is innocent; there is no knowledge that simply falls into our minds from the sky, pristine and untainted (Smith, 2006: 86). Language and objectivity are constrained by culture, and in turn do nothing more than use it to exert its power over the masses. Foucault writes, "Truth isn't outside of power, or lacking, in power; contrary to a myth . . . Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true" (Foucault, 1984: 72-73).

### 5.3.6 The Emerging Church on Language and Objectivity

Some Emerging Church leaders who voice their opinion on the subject of language and objectivity are quick to point out that Christians cannot be linguistic idealists – people who believe there are only words and not actual things. If this were so, there could not be an actual Creator so in this sense linguistic idealism would be atheism. If viewed in the way that many evangelical scholars see Derrida's deconstruction working in matters of biblical interpretation and the communication of knowledge, those in the Emerging Church acknowledge that such teaching and Christianity would be mutually exclusive.

However, where various leaders such as McLaren and Smith agree with postmodernist thinkers such as Derrida is in recognizing that everything comes down to a matter of interpretation. Smith restates Derrida by claiming that "there is interpretation all the way down" (Smith, 2006: 42). By holding this position, Smith and other leaders of the Emerging Church appear to be taking aim at objectivity, and while they unabashedly admit this is the case, they also claim this in no way threatens the overall message of the gospel or the teaching of historic Christianity. Smith says that the Scriptures give us "good reasons to reject the very notion of objectivity, while at the same time affirming the reality of truth and knowledge. I would agree that the gospel is an interpretation and that we can't know the gospel is true, if by knowledge we mean unmediated objectivity or pure access to 'the way things are' . . . it is wrong to conclude that this is antithetical to orthodox Christian faith" (Smith, 2006: 43-44).

Some leaders in the Emerging Church argue the following points: (1) that the Scriptures contain an interpretation of what took place at certain points in history; (2) a person must subjectively accept Scripture's revelatory interpretation, which requires faith, and such faith requires the generating work of the Holy Spirit. By these criteria, it would appear the Emerging Church could be classified as espousing a pre-suppositional form of apologetics. In fact, some

emergents overtly state that the classical method of Christianity's defense should be rejected because, as Derrida says, everything is a matter of interpretation (Smith, 2006: 50). Tony Jones states his opinion when he says, "We must stop looking for some objective Truth that is available when we delve into the text of the Bible" (Jones, 2001: 201).

All the material phenomena recorded in the gospels, according to Smith, need to be interpreted. By way of example, Smith offers the case of the centurion and the chief priests who, at the foot of Christ's cross, all saw the same thing but interpreted them differently. Moreover, Smith asserts that not everyone sees what the believer sees, with the Bible stating in Romans 1:20 that unbelievers' hearts are foolish and darkened, with the end result being that they construe or interpret the world as something other than God's creation. This, Smith says, naturally applies to matters of salvation for only by interpreting the resurrection of Jesus does one see that it confirms He is the Son of God (Smith, 2006: 49). In the end, emergents hold that a right interpretation is a gift from God and not something available to everybody – something those holding to a Calvinist position might nod in agreement with.

Emerging church philosophers defend Derrida and assert that conservative evangelical scholars who oppose him have misinterpreted his teachings. They claim that when Derrida states that there is nothing outside the text, he means there is no reality that is not always already interpreted through the mediating lens of language. To make this claim is to say that everything is a text, which means not that everything is a book, or that we live within a giant all-encompassing book, but rather that everything must be interpreted in order to be experienced. They feel comfortable asserting with Derrida the ubiquity of interpretation and that all our experience is always already an interpretation (Smith, 2006: 39).

Context and community become the predominant mediators in interpretation. Smith asserts that when Derrida says there is nothing outside the text, he means

there is nothing outside context. If the entire world is a text to be interpreted, then for the church, the narrative of the Scriptures is what should govern believers' very perception of the world. In this respect, the claim of *sola scriptura* means there is nothing outside the Text to them.

Community and culture then come alongside context to round out the interpretative process and act as an 'interpretative police' according to Derrida. This community, the Emerging Church says, is the believing community. The church is governed by the Scriptures and the Scriptures are only properly opened and active within the believing community. This is not unlike the teaching of Karl Barth's neo-orthodoxy, which says the Bible in and of itself is not the Word of God, but it becomes the Word of God when a believer is united with the Holy Spirit and reads the Bible – at that point it becomes alive and is God's Word to them. It becomes, then, a matter of faith, which is something McLaren speaks to: "Because knowledge is a luxury beyond our means, faith is the best we can hope for" (McLaren, 2003A: 173).

Emerging Church leaders are quick to point out that deconstruction does not mean that one can say just anything at all about a text; it is not a celebration of sheer indeterminacy. Given the goals and purpose of a given community, it establishes a consensus regarding the rules that will govern good interpretation (Smith, 2006:52-53).

In regard to Foucault's teaching, the Emerging Church sees the gospel as an interpretation of the world and human condition, with the focus being put on the proclamation and witness of revelation. It should not, Smith says, focus on apologetics as the demonstration of logic - using truth claims and propositions as a weapon or vehicle of power to bring others under its control (Smith, 2006: 58). McLaren puts it this way: "Drop any affair you may have with certainty, proof, argument – and replace it with dialogue, conversation, intrigue, and search" (McLaren, 2006B: 84).

Some in the Emerging Church feel comfortable with the postmodernist acceptance of the plurality of language games – a condition in which no one story can claim either universal auto-legitimation (because of the plurality of ‘the people’) nor appeal to a phantom universal reason (because reason is just one myth among others, which is itself rooted in a narrative) These particular Emerging Church leaders do not concern themselves with whether this situation is a new Babel or new Pentecost, but see the challenge as a unique opportunity for Christian witness in Postmodernity (Smith, 2006: 70).

### **5.3.7 Conservative Evangelicalism on Language and Objectivity**

Conservative scholars first begin a discussion on language and objective meaning by pointing out that wherever Christianity has gone, it has concerned itself with language and translation (Groothuis, 2000: 96). This, they say, clearly indicates that the Christian faith believes that language transcends community and cultural boundaries and has the ability to accurately communicate its message to any people during any time in history. They claim that Augustine understood the first article of his Christian faith to be that God had revealed Himself to human beings through the human voices that had been inspired to communicate His message, and that this message could be spread to everyone, everywhere (Adler, 1990: 29). Augustine realized that the first task of the theologian was that of exegesis, and those nodding in agreement with him view linguistic relativism as a covenant broken between the word and the world.

Next, they say that the only true way out of what they see as hermeneutical nihilism and metaphysical anti-realism concerning matters relating to God is the doctrine of revelation. The evangelical paradigm was never rationalist in the sense of claiming an autonomous reason; reason and faith go together, but the latter does not rule out the ability to properly communicate meaning where God’s plan of salvation is concerned (Mohler, 2005: 69).

Conservative evangelical theologians reject the notion that language is reality and instead assert that facts do not need statements in order to exist, but statements do indeed need facts in order to be true. For example, a person may be in pain without uttering a word, but once the person communicates their predicament, this does not in itself make it true (Groothuis, 2006: 90): it was true already. Properly speaking, they say, Foucault's observations on truth and power state nothing about the nature or definition of truth and how it relates to the sociology and psychology of beliefs. As an example, they say that Intelligent Design faces the daunting power structure of Western science. Power need not trump truth, but even if it does, truth remains truth (Groothuis, 2000: 102).

Conservative scholars also rebuff the stance of some Emerging Church leaders who reject the claim that propositional statements can communicate meaning. Propositional language does not rule out the personal aspect of communication, they contend. To come to Scripture, they say, is to be confronted with a truth that is both objective and rational on the one hand and personal and relational on the other. But some emergents are wrong, conservatives conclude, to suggest that a personal, relational, and covenantal knowing of God excludes a propositional component. Indeed, to say, 'We must treat Scripture not as facticity but as address' is to invoke just the kind of stultifying binary hierarchical opposition from which Postmodernity was supposed to have liberated us, they argue (Vanhoozer, 2005: 123).

As in the case with relative versus absolute truth, evangelical theologians also point out what they consider to be the self-defeating nature of some postmodernist and Emergent Church stances on language and objectivity. For example, if Derrida really meant what he argued – that the reader is in full possession of interpretive authority and not the writer – the reader is under no real obligation to consider Derrida's arguments. If the postmodernist premise is correct, we can never be sure that is what Derrida truly meant in his works because the one who possesses the real meaning behind the text is not Derrida but us.

They also contend that to say a person cannot approach a text with no preconditions is just as much a precondition in itself as any other precondition, so it should be ruled out as well. In the end, such a position simply leads to an infinite regress and offers nothing of real value to a person seeking objective meaning (Howe, 2004: 15).

Finally, conservative theologians offer up several other warnings to those embracing the postmodernist teaching on language and objectivity. First, because each person reads the 'reality' in a text differently as they encounter it, the end result is that there is no transcendent center to reality as a whole and no one meaning in the world – a condition that provides no firmness or assurance in any matter, including religion (Grenz, 1996: 6). Next, if there are no valid exegetes, who decides what is valid and what is not valid in any matter? What happens when consensus cannot be reached within a community or culture on various matters? Lastly, if something like evil is deconstructed into language games, no real evil can really remain, but only the evil of its attempted banishment and the haunting impression that something is deeply amiss (Groothuis, 2000: 171).

What then are the options, conservatives ask, when it comes to religious language and objective meaning? One can look towards historical relativism, take the road to Rome and the safety of numbers, or perhaps join a postmodern church where right reading is a function of one's local interpretive community, but none of these options look good to evangelical scholars. Christians, they say, should not sit in an interpretative mire where no one can decide how to act upon the teaching of the Bible. They ask postmodernist thinkers to imagine a country where a king makes a decree and his subjects set out to interpret rather than respond to it. Instead, what they say the church needs is a "hermeneutics of activation": action that results effortlessly from a lucid reading of an objectively true text (Vanhoozer, 2005: 119).

In the end, conservative evangelicalism contends that the claim is not to preach one truth among many, one savior among many, but something that is objectively, historically, and universally true via language that can be globally communicated with success (Mohler, 2005: 59). Perhaps the main fear these scholars express is that the message of the gospel will be undermined by a subjective use of words that is powered by a philosophy, which has ultimately tampered with reality.

### **5.3.8 Summary**

The philosophers who laid the foundation for Postmodernism in the areas of language and objectivity along with those who took up their mantle contend that language is a system of symbols that is not propped up by anything outside of language. They reject the referential theory of language in favor of a semiotic theory in which linguistic signs refer only to other signs and never to the world as it is. The aftermath of this for postmodernist adherents is a conclusion that we can no longer assume an ontological ground for certain knowledge. Conservative evangelicalism warns that if this stance is assumed, then society will be expected to live with the anxiety that results from Derrida's deconstruction of logocentrism and the demise of the metaphysics of presence (Grenz, 1996: 150). This end result naturally occurs, they say, because if the right orders of disciplines are Reality, Metaphysics, Epistemology, Linguistics, and Hermeneutics, then eliminating the first two building blocks can result in nothing but a total collapse of the structure and loss of meaning for everyone (Howe, 2004: 309).

Conservative scholars and some leaders of the Emerging Church do not disagree with the charge that interpretation occurs with a text; the former simply say that there are right and provable interpretations whereas the latter disagrees and argues that Christianity's rightful stance should be one of fideism.

## 5.4 PLURALISM AND EXCLUSIVITY

A relativistic view of truth that is combined with linguistic relativism and a denial of objectivity creates a perfect climate for a pluralistic view of religious ideas where no religion can claim to be 'right' in the sense of having an absolute correct stance on matters relating to God. If truth is relative and if any spoken or written authority is simply an interpretation that cannot possibly be objective, then an acceptance of all religious points of view as being equal is not an unreasonable position to hold.

A pluralist standpoint, however, does appear – at least on the surface – to run afoul of certain exclusivistic claims of Christianity, such as Christ's claim of being the one and only way to God (John 14:6). In understanding the challenge of pluralism to Christianity, it is useful to take a quick survey on the topic by examining where various postmodernist thinkers stand on the subject, and then look at how conservative scholars in Christianity go about resolving the issue of pluralism with exclusive claims that are made in the Bible.

### 5.5.1 What is Pluralism?

Before examining the differing views of pluralism, it is first important to actually define the term as there is not agreement on the exact description of pluralism and the depth at which it runs, especially in the area of religion. One Christian commentator defines pluralism as "the process by which the number of options in the private sphere of modern society rapidly multiplies at all levels, especially at the level of worldview, faiths, and ideologies" (Carson, 1996: 18). In essence, pluralism is an offering of alternatives in various realms such as food, music, religion and more, with individuals being able to freely make their selections with little cause of concern for whether a choice may be deemed 'correct' by anyone else. All selections have equal value, although some may appeal more to one person than another.

D. A. Carson asserts that there are three kinds of pluralistic phenomena: empirical pluralism, cherished pluralism, and philosophical / hermeneutical pluralism. Empirical pluralism simply refers to the fact that we all live in a diverse society. For example, America is a country of many languages, ethnicities, religions, and worldviews, and in modern times it is far more accurate to speak of American cultures than American culture. Empirical pluralism encourages alternatives and makes it easy for an individual to make person choices that are agreeable to them. One side-effect of this that may be perceived as negative by some and positive by others is that various loyalties to certain entities such as religious denominations can diminish.

Cherished pluralism takes empirical pluralism and adds an additional ingredient – approval. Missionary Leslie Newbiggin explains cherished pluralism as: “not merely a society which is in fact plural in the variety of cultures, religions, and lifestyles which it embraces, but pluralist in the sense that this plurality is celebrated as things to be approved and cherished” (Newbiggin, 1989: 1). With cherished pluralism, the fact that pluralism exists is extended and honored with the various choices from which one can choose being endorsed whether a person believes a particular choice – it is something for him/her or not. This is a key distinction from simply respecting a particular position or choice – something that goes beyond mere tolerance. Cherished pluralism says that a person must nod in agreement with a stance and in no way condemn it as wrong.

The last form of pluralism according to Carson is philosophical pluralism, and it is the one he believes to be the most dangerous to the Christian worldview. Philosophical pluralism naturally flows from celebrated pluralism and says that no religion has the right to pronounce itself right or true and the other competing faiths false, or even relatively inferior. For those who espouse a philosophical religious pluralism, there is no longer any heresy, except perhaps the view that there are heresies (Carson, 1996: 30).

One final trait to note about the definition, manifestations, and characteristics of pluralism is that it tends to be very syncretistic in nature, forming new selections from the existing choices that exist. In much the same way a person may walk down a buffet line and place various foods on their plate to form a unique meal, a philosophical pluralist will stride through the various religions of the world and select from them certain doctrines or positions that appeal to them and meld those teachings together to form a belief that becomes something entirely new, yet something that must be immediately accepted into the pluralist culture as being valid and equal to other existing beliefs.

### **5.5.2 How Pluralism Functions**

How can a pluralistic stance be reconciled with rational and logical thinking? While some conservative Christians do not think the two can be united, other thinkers offer ideas on how they see it can happen. With respect to truth in religion, there is the thought of the Arabic philosopher Averroes (1126 – 1198) who said that religious belief and the truths of science are not the same kind of truth. The Averroistic dualism of truth consisted of two distinct realms of truth: truths of religious faith and truths of science and technology with neither coming into contact with the other as they are separated into logic-tight compartments. While conservative evangelicals regard such a separation as schizophrenia, to followers of Averroistic thought, it is regarded as healthy because human life and the natural world belong together (Adler, 1990: 73).

The former are truths of the imagination and are poetically true; the latter are truths of reason and are logically and factually true. Opposing Averroes is Thomas Aquinas who held that truths of faith and truths of reason are truths of the same kind: they are both logical and factual. This exhibits, once again, that an ideological conflict exists – not merely a conflict between beliefs, but conflict about the nature of belief itself (Adler, 1990: 103).

Joseph Cambell agrees with Averroes and makes two points: (1) mythologies do not have any factual truth but only the kind of truth that is appropriate to poetry or fiction; and (2) a religion is a mythology incorrectly interpreted as having factual truth. Two conclusions that can be drawn from Cambell's assertions are, first, in the factual sense of truth, no religion ends up being 'true'. Second, in the poetical sense of truth, all religions become true in varying degrees (Adler, 1990: 84). Agreeing with Cambell is Mahatma Gandhi who once said: "The soul of religion is one, but it is encased in a multitude of forms" (Green, 2002: 14).

This is a central theme in pluralism and Postmodernism as well – that all religions are true and ultimately lead to God. Swiss theologian and Catholic priest Hans Küng offers up what he believes to be the only four options in the matter of one true faith versus all religions being true. First, none is true; there is not one religion that indeed has the truth when it comes to belief and faith in God. Second, one religion is true and all beliefs with principles that contradict that one true religion are false. Third, one religion is true in all major respects, and other religions share in that truth in various ways. Fourth and finally, all religions are true in some way (Küng, 1990: 230-36). Küng's statements subtly point out a couple of key points worth noting – primarily that contradictories say no middle ground is possible (e.g. atheist versus theist), but contraries give way to possible middle ground. For example, a person who says there is one God may disagree with another who says there are many gods, but both could be false, and a third possibility – atheism – could be true.

To try and narrow down the various possibilities that Küng presents and arrive at a firmer (or possibly singular) footing, Mortimer Adler believes that a philosophical approach that adheres to logical first principles provides the only study of religion that considers all religions impartially and therefore only it can arrive at a conclusion on the matter (Adler, 1990: 43). However, such thinking naturally runs up against postmodernist thought that says no one comes to the religious table without prejudice.

Al Mohler believes that a test of logical consistency is what is needed to break through the impartiality problem that postmodernist thinkers believe Adler has. The task of the one seeking truth in religion is to use logical consistency as a negative test for truth, and coherence a subordinate test. The hopeful end result, Mohler says, is that Christian theology exhibits the content of divine revelation as an orderly whole, and is free of both contradictories and contradictions (Mohler, 2005: 71).

Defenders of traditional Christianity such as Mohler affirm that a foundation for apologetics will minimally affirm two broad principles against pluralistic thinking. First, there are essential truths of logic that are necessary for all intelligible thought and rational discourse, regardless of the subject matter – religious or otherwise. Second, there are also basic forms of reasoning that are nonnegotiable and are universally valid; they are not matters of contingent social construction or personal taste (Groothuis, 2000: 177). Both of these tenets are threatened by pluralism, with the second point being particularly important to understand when it comes to seeing the dichotomy of thought that exists between conservative theologians and more liberal Christian thinkers as well as postmodernist philosophers.

This leads to the last point of examination as to how pluralism functions and operates – how community and culture factor in. The relativistic pluralism of Modernism was very individualistic and exalted personal taste and individual choice as the final authority, with personal opinion overriding any notion of global truth. Postmodernism, by contrast, turns to its community as the final arbiter of what is true (Grenz, 1996: 15). Truth that only applies within a community is sometimes called ‘rule theory’ and it rejects the idea that doctrine-expressing sentences are primarily expressive of positions, and so they become bearers of truth-value and conveyers of information about extramental and extralinguistic realities (Groothuis, 2000: 118). Simply put – if correct – it would mean that a Buddhist community and a Christian community cannot

contradict each other. Thus, truth is compartmentalized yet again, but rather than being done in an Averroistic philosophical separation of truth, it is done via communities that differ from one another in what they choose to accept and practice.

### 5.5.3 The Emerging Church on Pluralism

As previously stated in this chapter, some leaders in the Emerging Church tend not to bristle at Derrida's teachings on deconstruction, but rather agree that everything in the end is interpretation. This, they feel, is a good thing. It is something that empowers humanity to question the interpretations of everyone from presidents to CEOs, with emergents reaching the conclusion that the situation is not unlike the Old Testament prophets' questioning of the dominant interpretations of the world (Smith, 2006: 51).

This being the case, it is not surprising to see that they do not deny or worry about the existence of pluralism. James Smith writes, "To embrace this [that everything is interpretation according to Derrida] (creational!) reality of ubiquitous interpretation requires that we embrace the corresponding reality of pluralism. Wherever there is interpretation, there will be conflict of interpretation" (Smith, 2006: 50).

Such a stance naturally enables some in the Emerging Church to conclude that pluralism is not something to necessarily be feared, but to be understood as a mood of tolerance that must be offered to all religions because none can truly be given an objectively true rightful place in any society since every claim is opinion only. Smith says:

"However we need to consider these deep differences in interpretation rather than glibly supposing that the Christian account is objectively true and then castigating the Buddhist account for being merely an interpretation. In fact, both are interpretations; neither is *objectively* true. . . . It should not, however; translate into skepticism about the truth of the Christian confession. The loss of objectivity, then, does not entail a loss of

kerygmatic boldness about the truth of the gospel” (Smith, 2006: 50-51, emphasis in the original).

Although Smith asserts that a loss of objectivity and an acknowledgement of interpretation-only foundations for every faith should not reduce the evangelistic fervor of those proclaiming the Christian truth amidst a sea of competing truth claims, he offers no reasons as to why anyone should embrace Christianity over a pantheistic or atheistic offer. This is just one area of concern that traditionalist scholars express over the views of some in the Emerging Church and pluralism in general.

Some Emergent Church leaders are clear in their opinions when the question of pluralism arises. Alan Jones, for example, states his position when he says, “Christ and Buddha are not antithetical” (Jones, 2004: 146). McLaren appears to agree with Jones when he states: “I don’t hope all Jews or Hindus will become members of the Christian religion. But I do hope all who feel so called will become Jewish or Hindu followers of Jesus” (McLaren, 2006A: 297). Exclusivity, where matters of faith are concerned, does not appear to be something McLaren believes Jesus embraced. This becomes evident when he makes the following claim: “Missional Christian faith asserts that Jesus did not come to make some people saved and others condemned. Jesus did not come to help some people be right while leaving everyone else to be wrong. Jesus did not come to create another exclusive religion” (McLaren, 2006A: 109). McLaren adds in another one of his works: “Universalism is not as bankrupt of biblical support as some suggest” (McLaren, 2003B: 103).

#### **5.5.4 Conservative Evangelical Concerns about Pluralism**

Conservative theologians voice a number of concerns over what they see in the various forms of pluralism, but especially its philosophical form. At the outset, they warn about the distinction being lost between opinion and truth. Pluralism is desirable and tolerable only in those areas that are matters of taste rather than matters of truth, they believe. They certainly believe that there is room for

competing and conflicting theories, hypotheses, doctrines and propositions, but only as long as no single one of them is at a given time established as true; one simply cannot be open-minded and approving about excluded alternatives. Pluralists seem seldom, if ever, to be concerned with questions about truth found in the area of religion (Adler, 1990:42).

The concern over the pluralist's regard for truth continues from this first point for these scholars and leads to different issues that they see. They assert that the one and only doctrine with which philosophical pluralism can agree across the board is that objective truth cannot be known. The end result, they believe, is a 'culture of disbelief' because objective truth ends up becoming marginalized at the very least and 'ruled out of court' in the vast majority of situations.

Pluralism's stance on truth extends beyond the present and back into the past, with each interpretation of the past being entirely subjective and none of them being able to claim any supreme tie to the truth. This being the case, the pursuit of historical truth in any objective sense is a chimera (Carson, 1996: 23-25).

Conservative evangelicals also point out what they believe to be issues with the eradication of first principles in pluralism. Whether it is a community or a single individual, the problem as they see it is that the various worldviews become a blend of fundamentally opposing conceptions of authority, morality, truth, the good, revelation, and so forth. The observation noted earlier that syncretism rules in pluralism causes problems according to these scholars because they claim the possibility exists for people without strong doctrinal commitments to take on highly diverse and even incompatible ideas and fuse them together. If postmodernists embrace non-logical ways of knowing truth that elevate emotions and intuition over supposed facts, then the end result is a belief that says a plurality of truths can exist together without committing any offence against logic or without creating some kind of logical mire (Grenz, 1996: 14).

The loss of logic and critical thinking that occurs in pluralism ultimately leads to a meaningless framework that provides no real basis for reality, conservatives say. C. S. Lewis writes: "It is no use trying to 'see through' first principles. . . . To 'see through' all things is the same as not to see" (Lewis, 2001: 86-87). Attempting to compartmentalize irreconcilable facts is futile according to these scholars. Adler states that to affirm the unity of truth is to deny the possibility that there can be two separate and irreconcilable truths – truths that appear contradicting of one another and are thought to be irreconcilable, but avoid the principle of noncontradiction by claiming to belong to logic-tight compartments (Adler, 1990: 118).

Next, conservative Christians question how unity can ever be achieved even inside a particular postmodernist community if pluralism is allowed to flow as it is intended. Mortimer Adler asserts that pluralism is a desirable policy in all realms of action and thought except those in which unity is required. For example, two or more competing governments cannot exist unless one is subordinate to the other. A climate desiring pluralism, feels Adler, must be subordinate to a controlling unity (Adler, 1990: 1-2).

Another observation conservatives make is that pluralism is supposed to lead to more civility and tolerance but they do not believe that is what has happened. They say there is actually less discussion of the merits of competing ideas and less civility. If any religion claims that in some measure other religions are wrong, a line has been crossed and resentment is immediately stirred up: pluralism (in the third sense) has been challenged. Correspondingly, proselytism is a dirty word and ideas cannot be argued out in the marketplace. Philosophical pluralism tends to squash any strong opinion that makes exclusive truth claims. Instead pluralism has turned out to be extraordinarily intolerant, with Western culture in particular exhibiting what has been called a 'culture of complaint' (Carson, 1996: 32).

Lastly, conservative Christian thinkers feel that pluralism creates a situation where transcendent moral obligations are lost. Coupled with secular teachings of psychology and sociology, pluralism has bulldozed moral responsibility into the nearest landfill because no one can truly point to any one standard of ethics by which society should live (Carson, 1996: 51). These scholars feel that a “heretical imperative” is at work today in this area. While a heretic in premodern times chose a belief against the well-entrenched cultural and religious majority, today, in a sense, everyone must be a heretic because people select their religious and ethical preferences from an array of options none of which is mandated (Groothuis, 2000: 53).

D. A. Carson underscores conservative evangelical’s concerns about what they see as a dangerous element of pluralism when he says:

“In my most somber moods I sometimes wonder if the ugly face of what I refer to as philosophical pluralism is the most dangerous threat to the gospel since the rise of the Gnostic heresy in the second century, and for some of the same reasons. Part of the danger arises from the fact that the new hermeneutic and its assorted offspring are not entirely wrong: it would be easier to damn an ideology that was wholly and pervasively corrupt” (Carson, 1996: 10).

### **5.5.5 Summary**

It can be argued that one of the central hallmarks of postmodernist expression is pluralism. A pluralistic position naturally follows the acceptance of relativistic truth and linguistics. Any real standard to referee competing truth claims cannot be found as no straight line exists whereby to judge a line crooked, with the only reasonable conclusion being that all voices must be granted equal weight and none excluded as invalid.

Within the pluralist worldview, there is a willingness to let seemingly conflicting constructions exist side by side with the point of issue not being “Is this proposition or theory correct?” but rather “What does it do?” or “What is

its outcome?" This falls in well with Rorty's view of pragmatism (Grenz, 1996: 43).

In the end, pluralism's contribution to Postmodernism's argument with Christianity is a rejection of transcendental standards that leads to a loss of being able to answer the question of why anyone should objectively believe anything besides an appeal to personal preference. Wittgenstein notes this reality when he writes: "If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do'" (Wittgenstein, 1991: 217).

## **5.5 DISILLUSIONMENT AND CHRISTIANITY**

A pluralistic climate encourages great freedom in terms of spiritual autonomy and commitment to a community of one's choice, as well as a lack of any fear of condemnation that a choice one makes regarding spiritual matters or lifestyle would be deemed 'wrong' by any overarching authority. If truth is relative, language only offers interpretations of reality, and the religious playing field has been leveled by pluralism so that all religions are given equal weight with respect to being correct, then it would appear on the surface that the encouraging exploratory atmosphere created by pluralism would yield more investigations in the area of faith, which would in turn lead to greater cultural and personal enlightenment and fulfillment.

Some indeed argue that this is the case. Old ways of believing have given way to a questioning of everything and a philosophy that gives few excuses to anyone not finding the faith that is right for them and a community in which they can thrive. But others see something different. They observe what they believe to be a postmodernist despair about not having anything objective to believe in and no ultimate source of truth to cling to. Postmodernism's spiritual seekers, they say, have become convinced there is nothing more to find than a host of conflicting interpretations and an infinity of linguistically created

worlds that offer nothing real in the end (Grenz, 1996: 163). In this atmosphere where the Christian faith should have great opportunity, critics of Christianity charge that the faith has not lived up to the teachings of its founder. Instead, they say, Christianity has come to be known more for what it opposes than for what it stands for, with the end result being a huge image problem for the faith and an outright rejection of it.

### **5.5.1 A Brief Look at Recent Research on Spirituality**

There are a number of recent studies whose conclusions say that spirituality is thriving, but they also say there is a mixture of individual's content with the faith they practice, but also many who are disillusioned or apathetic. The research also indicates that traditional religion is not viewed as highly as in the past, but instead the focus today is on spirituality, which is seen as something different than religion. This could be construed as a possible indicator that pluralism is indeed birthing community-based as well as individualistic practices that *may* bear some resemblance to conventional religious forms, but go further so that they take on their own styles and modes of practice.

From 2006 through 2008, the Search Institute's Center for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence together with partners in different parts of the world conducted a study on spiritual development by interacting with more than 7,000 youth between ages of 12 and 25, who lived in 17 countries on six different continents. Through a series of exploratory focus groups, interviews, and surveys, the analysis gained new insight into the practices and opinions that modern day youth have on the topic of religion and spirituality across multiple countries and traditions. Although the study was quite large, the conclusions of the research can be distilled down into a number of key findings that help contribute to the understanding of whether those in the postmodernist era feel more spiritually enlightened or are experiencing disillusionment.

First, an average of only 7% of youth said they did not believe life has a spiritual dimension or said they did not know. Among youth who believed there is a spiritual dimension to life, they are most likely to understand it as “believing there is a purpose to life,” “believing in God,” or “being true to one’s inner self” (Roehlkepartain, 2008: 13). Although such a high positive response rate appears to settle the matter on spiritual enlightenment, reaching such a conclusion may be premature. The second important metric shows that, although a high percentage of the respondents thought a spiritual dimension existed, only one-third considered themselves to be “very” or “pretty” spiritual (Roehlkepartain, 2008: 21). Such a statistic would seem to indicate either an apathetic attitude in regard to spiritual matters or a feeling of disillusionment despite the fact that they acknowledge such a dimension exists.

The study goes on to show that the vast majority (nearly three quarters) of respondents view spirituality and religion positively, but they did see the two differently, with one respondent stating the difference being: “‘Religious’ is kind of knowing the things in your head, but ‘spiritual’ is knowing them in your heart” (Roehlkepartain, 2008: 28). In terms of receiving assistance in spiritual growth and direction, one in five said they receive no help at all, with just 14% saying they receive insight and direction from a traditional church, synagogue, mosque, or similar institution (Roehlkepartain, 2008: 35). Further, while belonging to a community is a major goal of the postmodernist generation, many in the study indicated they had not done so when it came to matters of faith. More than 70% of those surveyed indicated no such sense of connection or closeness with a spiritual community (Roehlkepartain, 2008: 15).

In the end, the researchers found that over half of those in the study did not indicate they were doing “well” spiritually at all (Roehlkepartain, 2008: 19). This statistic alone argues against a greater sense of spiritual illumination occurring among those in the postmodernist era. Unfortunately, no question was asked in the study as to what the respondents would need to maximize spiritual enlightenment or realization.

With respect to how much religion is impacting everyday life, another survey done by Gallup in America found that 67% of those polled felt that religion was losing its influence over the culture and how people lived their lives. Moreover, when asked the question of whether religion had the answers to today's problems, just over half responded 'yes', which has fallen from 66% just a decade ago (Gallup, 2008: 1).

Overall, it can be somewhat argued that while the younger generation overwhelmingly acknowledge that life contains a spiritual dimension, they also exhibit a general trend toward either apathy or disillusionment in the postmodernist era. As this conclusion applies to the general context of religion, it is important to next investigate the trends and impressions that the same general demographic has of Christianity.

### **5.5.2 Specific Research Regarding Christianity**

There are those that argue that Christianity has an image problem where the postmodernist population is concerned. Whether the perceived image problem is justified or not is a separate matter; if the negative impression of Christianity truly exists, it becomes very important especially in the postmodernist era because, as has been argued in previous sections of this chapter, what people think, speak, and write becomes their reality.

David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group (an research organization focusing on religious trends and information), asserts that the primary issue that Postmodernism has with Christianity is that it views the Christian faith as no longer representing what its founder had in mind. The primary complaint appears to be that it has lost the compassion and caring preached by Christ and instead it has turned into a juggernaut of fearmongering and restrictor of freedom (Kinnaman, 2007: 15). Kinnaman studied the Mosaic (born between 1984 and 2002) and Busters (born between 1965 and 1983) generations of the

United States, which currently comprise approximately 77% of America's population (mosaics and busters). In keeping with the Search Institute's findings, Kinnaman found that spirituality is indeed something that ranks as important to his studied demographic, yet fewer than one out of ten states that faith is their top priority. Also in stride with the postmodernist view of pluralism, he found that both Mosaics and Busters view life in a nonlinear and chaotic way, and are perfectly at home with apparent contradictions and ambiguity in religious life (Kinnaman, 2007: 23).

With respect to Christianity, Kinnaman notes a growing tide of hostility and resentment – a statistic which is trending downward from a positive study that was done by his Barna group only one decade before. He discovered that of the non-believers surveyed that were aware of the term “evangelical” (as it relates to Christianity), nearly half had a bad impression, 47% had a neutral impression, and only 3% had a good impression (Kinnaman, 2007: 25).

Why such a dismal rating? There were two things that Kinnaman's study uncovered, and neither had anything to do with the theological teachings or doctrinal standards of the Church. First, unbelieving postmodernists signaled negativity to what they termed the Christian “swagger” – how Christians go about things in the world, along with the bark and bite that unbelievers stated that they see in Christians' demeanor and actions. Second, as previously stated, postmodernists said that the charity and compassion of Jesus' teaching in the Gospels have been dismissed by Christians in favor of combative actions against what they believe to be threats against its moral positions. In other words, Christians have become famous for what they oppose and stand against rather than for what they are in favor of and champion (Kinnaman, 2007: 26).

With respect to what the current and upcoming generations specifically cite as the things they see Christianity being known for, an anti-homosexual stance ranks first (91%), followed by a judgmental attitude (87%), and a hypocritical lifestyle (85%). Other criticisms included being too involved in the political

process, being out of touch with reality, an insensitivity to others, being boring, having confusing teachings, and not being accepting of others' faiths. In addition to these overt statements, Kinnaman's research reflected the findings of the Search Institute's in the area of apathy and indifference. While open hostility was certainly present, an equal number of those surveyed did not think Christianity worth any attention whatsoever – that it held no draw or interest at all (Kinnaman, 2007: 28).

However, as has been noted, such negative illustrations do not mean that the surveyed demographic does not recognize spirituality as being real; indeed they acknowledge that a realm exists and extends beyond Modernism's naturalistic-only framework. But it does mean that the postmodernist generation is open and looking for alternatives to Christianity and is especially eager to find ones that offer teachings that they personally find attractive and relevant irrespective of whether those teachings can be shown to be objectively true or logically consistent.

### **5.5.3 Research on Wicca**

An example of a belief system that is gathering strength from the disillusionment that some are experiencing from traditional forms of religion is Wicca, which has been popularized by TV series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. An academic study performed in 2008 by Dr. Kirstin Aune found that more than 50,000 women a year have deserted their congregations over the past two decades because they feel Christianity is not relevant to their lives. Instead, Aune says that young women are becoming attracted to the pagan religion Wicca (literally: "The Craft"), which has grown in popularity after being featured positively in films, TV shows and books, and is something that offers females a central role. Aune, a sociologist, said that, in short, women are abandoning the Church. Because of its focus on female empowerment, young women are attracted by Wicca. Aune found that young women tend to express

egalitarian values and dislike the traditionalism and hierarchies they believe are integral to the Church (Beckford, 2008).

Aune's research cites an English Church Census which found more than a million women worshippers have left churches since 1989 and that, over the past decade, it claims that women have been leaving churches at twice the rate of men. She claims that feminism is a major factor as to why many women have put off going to church in recent years – that it has challenged the traditional Christian view of women's roles and raised their aspirations. In addition, Aune found that minor reasons for women's exodus from the Church and flight to Wicca include the Church's silence about sexual desire and activity, and hostility to single-parent families and unmarried couples which are now a reality for many women (Beckford, 2008).

Christian researchers and authors Dillon Burroughs and Marla Alupoiceci have found that Wicca has become a major force in America and a strong alternative to Christianity. While working as a youth pastor, Burroughs found that the number one religion he encountered in his ministry among young postmodernists was not Islam as has been traditionally thought, but Wicca. He cites studies done that assert Wicca is now the fastest growing religion in America and may become the third largest faith by 2015. Catering to this trend are many educational institutions that have arisen to train new converts to The Craft such as Witcheschool.com, which at the date of Burroughs and Alupoiceci's writing listed over 130,000 students and a staff of 300 employees (Burroughs, 2008: 11-13).

Burroughs and Alupoiceci concur with Aune's research on Wicca's appeal to women in particular (about two-thirds of adherents are females), but they also found that men participate in Wicca as well. In addition to the empowering feel the religion gives women, two other attractive traits of the movement over Christianity are what it perceives to be greater individual freedom and a strong sense of community, which is a trademark goal of postmodernists. The core

mantra of Wicca is the philosophy, *An it harm none, do as you will*, which in contemporary English simply means as long as it does not hurt anyone else, do whatever you want. This stands in stark contrast to Wiccans' view of the Christian moral teachings that say a particular behavior can be wrong even when no one in particular is affected by the action (i.e. sin always has a target outside of the human race – it is rebellion against God). The community aspect of Wicca is somewhat fueled by the internet and popular gathering sites such as [witchvox.com](http://witchvox.com) (“the witches’ voice”) where many gather, share information, and learn from one another. Wiccans say that their hearts and souls have been starved by a lack of meaningful relationships with traditional religion, God, other people, and nature, and so they turn to Wicca because they long for a faith that feels to them real and tangible (Burroughs, 2008: 39).

#### **5.5.4 Evangelical Thoughts on Postmodern Critiques of the Church**

The criticisms aimed at conservative Christianity by Postmodernism and the current image problems being experienced by the Church are acknowledged by both conservative evangelical and Emergent Church leaders. The inability for the Church to live out the teachings of Christ, the lack of authenticity in the lives of many Christians, and a wrong focus are highlighted as the key issues by today's conservative Christian thinkers. They recognize that members of the postmodernist generation are often unimpressed by a verbal presentation of the gospel and what they want to see instead is a people who live out the gospel in wholesome, authentic, and healing relationships (Grenz, 1996: 169). They admit that giving apologetic answers is oftentimes not the problem, but that a failure to present Christ in a ‘fifth gospel’ (i.e. the Christian person themselves) is.

This area is one where Emerging Church leaders and conservative Christian scholars unite. Key individuals in the Emerging Church movements say that in addition to the narration of the story in Scripture, the postmodernist church needs to narrate the story in its practices where worship is characterized by hospitality and acceptance. They say that postmodernists do not want a

religious version of what they can already get at the mall, but instead they are searching for the mysterious practices of the ancient gospel, which means that the Church's storytelling should be supported by its story living (Smith, 2006: 77-79).

This is a characteristic noted by Nietzsche who once said that he would believe in the Redeemer when the Christians looked more redeemed. Evangelical conservatives do not run from this admonition, but instead acknowledge it, and admit that a lack of authenticity is crippling the Church in the current era. "If this conversion is truly supernatural, then why is it not more evident in the lives of so many Christians that I know?" is the one question (asked by a Hindu acquaintance) that apologist Ravi Zacharias says has bothered him the most throughout his long career. Conservatives like Zacharias openly state that they are acutely aware of history lessons such as that of Karl Marx who turned away from religion when he saw his Jewish father abandon their faith in favor of joining the Lutheran church simply to help his business grow.

In addition to being unified in the cry for more authenticity, conservative theologians also agree that while apologetics needs to be truth-centered, it must also be person-sensitive and culturally aware (Groothuis, 2000: 184). The community of the Church should play a much larger role than it does today in the modern day culture, with leaders pointing out that God does not merely speak truth to isolated, autonomous individuals, but rather to the Church – to His redeemed people who form a vibrant and attractive community (Mohler, 2005: 70). Mere apologetic propositions are not enough – instead, evangelical leaders say that the Church should enter into a covenantal relation of truth: one where words, thoughts, and deeds conform to the image of the One who is the truth incarnate. Then the Church will have a practical, transformative, and relational truth and a covenantal relationship, which ultimately results in a "hermeneutic of activation" where people are concerned (Vanhoozer, 2005: 124).

### 5.5.5 Summary

It is interesting to note that the vast majority of current teenage and young adults believe that life has a religious or spiritual dimension to it, but the absolute reverse is true when it comes to whether these same individuals feel that faith deserves top priority in their lives. If the pluralistic culture has done its work and created an atmosphere where there is little external resistance applied by culture to exploring, practicing, or creating a faith that “works” for a person, then it is curious as to why more do not feel that they are doing “well” spiritually. A few reasons are possible, with the first being that perhaps those being profiled in recent studies simply do not feel they are living up to the standards set by the faith they have chosen. Another possibility is that they are not experiencing what they had hoped for in the particular practice and/or community that they have committed to. Whatever the reason, there does seem to be a sense of some disillusionment or apathy among the up and coming generations.

One thing does appear clear: these same generations do not view Christianity in a very positive light, with the trend being clearly downward over the past decade or so. A lack of authenticity, a breakdown in more clearly communicating what the Church stands for, and a failure to show the compassion and sensitivity to others that are seen in the Gospel accounts of Christ appear to be the key charges laid at Christianity’s doorstep. These issues and others have driven those in the postmodernist era to seek spiritual alternatives to Christianity such as Wicca and others, which are seen as more attractive and accommodating.

But a non-spiritual position appears to not be a platform gaining ground in Postmodernism, and this is a good thing for Christianity. The postmodernist era still calls out for an unmet need, and an eviction of the spiritual leaves room only for philosophy, which most believe falls short of filling the void. As Mortimer Adler notes:

“Philosophy calls for no differentiation between the sacred and the profane, the holy and the secular; philosophy has no rituals, ceremonials, sacraments; it has no forms of worship; it has no priesthood or persons who officiate at religious ceremonies and rituals; it has no hierarchy of officialdom; it has no sacred words or objects; it has no prayers. It prescribes no way of life to be followed as the means to the salvation of the spirit, here or hereafter. Moral philosophies may include rules of conduct, but they are not directed toward spiritual salvation” (Adler, 1990: 91).

## 5.6 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter has not been to critique Postmodernism so much as it has been to expose and detail four key challenges facing Christianity brought by the postmodernist culture. Although some may argue that the issues covered in this chapter are not *the* most troublesome problems that are presented to Christianity, it is hard to dispute the fact that they are formidable opponents that demand answers if evangelistic campaigns of the Church are to be successful.

The concept of relativistic truth opposes the idea of absolute truth that early theologians embraced, and it can be argued that it alone serves as a foundational position from which all other postmodernist positions spring. If absolute truth cannot be acknowledged and found, then linguistic relativism is a very reasonable position to hold as is pluralism. The compartmentalizing of truth that can be traced through history helps soften the blow for the postmodernist person who looks at matters of science and faith, although some postmodernist philosophers argue that even science is nothing more than a narrative that teems with prejudiced bias, and that even it cannot be trusted as being objective and true. Some leaders of the Emerging Church do not appear as concerned over the loss of absolute truth as do conservative theologians who claim that, without a solid foundation of objective truth, there is no reason why anyone should truly believe in anything.

Conservative scholars also assert that effective evangelism depends on the ability for finite human language to communicate meaningful and objective truth. Language, they say, must be able to accurately describe a transcendent message that applies to all peoples, for all times, and in all places. This position is challenged by postmodernist thinkers who argue that language cannot measure up to the unreasonable standards that evangelicals require.

Postmodern philosophers say that there is no neutral playing ground where language is concerned and so it becomes something that is merely a hermeneutic perspectivism – nothing but interpretation with no ‘right’ view ever being known. The end conclusion of this is that we can no longer assume an ontological ground for certain knowledge. It should be remembered that both conservative scholars and some leaders in the Emerging Church do not disagree with the charge that interpretation occurs with a text, but that the former says there are right and provable interpretations whereas the latter disagrees and argues that Christianity is indeed interpretation all the way down; there is truly nothing outside the text.

When a relativistic view of truth is combined with linguistic relativism, a perfect atmosphere is created for pluralism. If truth is indeed relative and any spoken or written authority is nothing but an interpretation that cannot possibly be objective, then a very reasonable conclusion is that all religious points of view are equal and must be acknowledged as being valid.

Conservative Christian theologians who believe in the exclusivity of the gospel naturally object to pluralism and they utilize first principles such as the law of non-contradiction to point out that contradictory claims made about reality (e.g. the nature of God) cannot support an intelligent and coherent stance. They further feel that, whereas in the past philosophers held to an egalitarian view of people and an elitist view of ideas (i.e. all people have equal worth, but not all ideas do), now a reversal has occurred where an egalitarian view of ideas is embraced along with an elitist view of people.

The final challenge noted in this chapter deals with research that show a current perception of Christianity that is overwhelmingly negative, although spirituality is viewed positively and is something not denied as being real by postmodernists. Such findings would seem to indicate that Christianity is losing tremendous opportunities among the population, with a vast majority admitting to there being a spiritual reality, but over half saying they are either apathetic about matters of faith or do not consider themselves as fulfilled in the practices and community they belong to.

Next, we will turn our attention to how Paul's apologetic framework as identified in earlier chapters might be applied to the Postmodern challenges identified in this chapter.

## CHAPTER 6: APPLYING PAUL'S APOLOGETIC FRAMEWORK TO A POSTMODERNISTIC CONTEXT

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

N. T. Wright says, "The question of how we use Paul for today remains as firmly on the table as ever" (Wright, 1997: 21). That said, the aim of this chapter is an attempt to answer the question of how we use Paul today where his apologetics are concerned. I will propose an application of the Pauline apologetic framework that was discussed in Chapters Three and Four to the postmodernist challenges documented in Chapter Five, and will examine it for relevancy by cross-referencing the spiritual characteristics of Paul's first century society (found in Chapter Two) with the postmodernist culture of today.

Within this chapter, I will also present the case that, out of the various contemporary Christian apologists and their methodologies that I investigated, the one whose model most closely mirrors the Apostle Paul's framework in its various dimensions (rational, spiritual, moral) is that of Francis Schaeffer. Therefore, there will be numerous quotations from and references to Schaeffer. However, I will also note some of the key differences between Schaeffer's and Paul's methods (e.g. Paul's emphasis on the resurrection, Schaeffer's focus on the tension that exists within humanity). Schaeffer is oftentimes characterized as being purely presuppositional in his apologetic approach (Geisler, 1999A: 44, Cowan, 2000: 19) but I will show that while Schaeffer did draw upon the Old Princetonian presuppositional approach of Cornelius Van Til, he developed a new style of apologetics and held to a belief that no one predefined apologetic approach could meet the needs of all people (Follis, 2006: 30-31). In like manner, Paul said to the Colossians: "Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you *will know how you should respond to each person*" (Col. 4:6, emphasis added). We will see how closely Schaeffer utilized *tria martus* apologetics, with the evidence showing that he especially emphasized

the third part of the framework (Paul's *manner*) holding that love was the final apologetic (Schaeffer, 1976: 14).

Once all of the findings have been presented, we will be able to determine how the Pauline apologetic framework addresses the issues raised in Chapter Five and if Paul's methodology can aptly answer the challenge laid down by Alasdair MacIntyre who said, "Theologians still owe it to the rest of us to explain why we should not treat their discipline as we do astrology or phrenology" (MacIntyre, 1979: 443).

## **6.2 A PROPOSED APPLICATION OF THREE WITNESS APOLOGETICS**

Many of some characteristics of Paul's first century culture permeate the climate of Postmodernism that is being experienced today. For example, as noted in earlier chapters, Paul confronted a world with many spiritual views and religious syncretism (cf. Chapter 2, 2.2.1). That same spiritual climate is revealed in modern day studies such as those that were profiled in Chapter Five (cf. 5.5). Paul's era also maintained a non-exclusivist position on matters of spirituality (cf. 2.2.1) and the same can be found in the current postmodernist culture and its embrace of pluralism (cf. 5.4). In Chapter Two, data was provided that described how the first century populace was greatly bothered by their unsettling social conditions and therefore was hungry for *soteria* (cf. 2.2.3). Today, the same expressions for salvation are made by postmodernists who are disenchanted with the failures of both Modernism (cf. 5.1) and what they see as a malfunction in established religion (cf. 5.5). More parallels can certainly be given, but the point is that the evidence shows enough similarities to provide confidence for the position that an attempt should be made to apply the Pauline apologetic framework to Postmodernism's challenges. But how might an application of Paul's apologetics be performed?

## 6.2.1 Overview of a Proposed Application

The task of bringing Paul's *tria martus* apologetics into the current era requires not just a simple transfer of the three elements that make up the Apostle's framework, but instead a thoughtful organization of the various aspects that comprise his apologetics so the challenges discussed in Chapter Five can be adequately addressed in every person regardless of where the evangelistic prospect currently is in their philosophy and spiritual mindset. From the data that has been gathered and reviewed up to this point, my proposal is that such an organization should resemble the following:

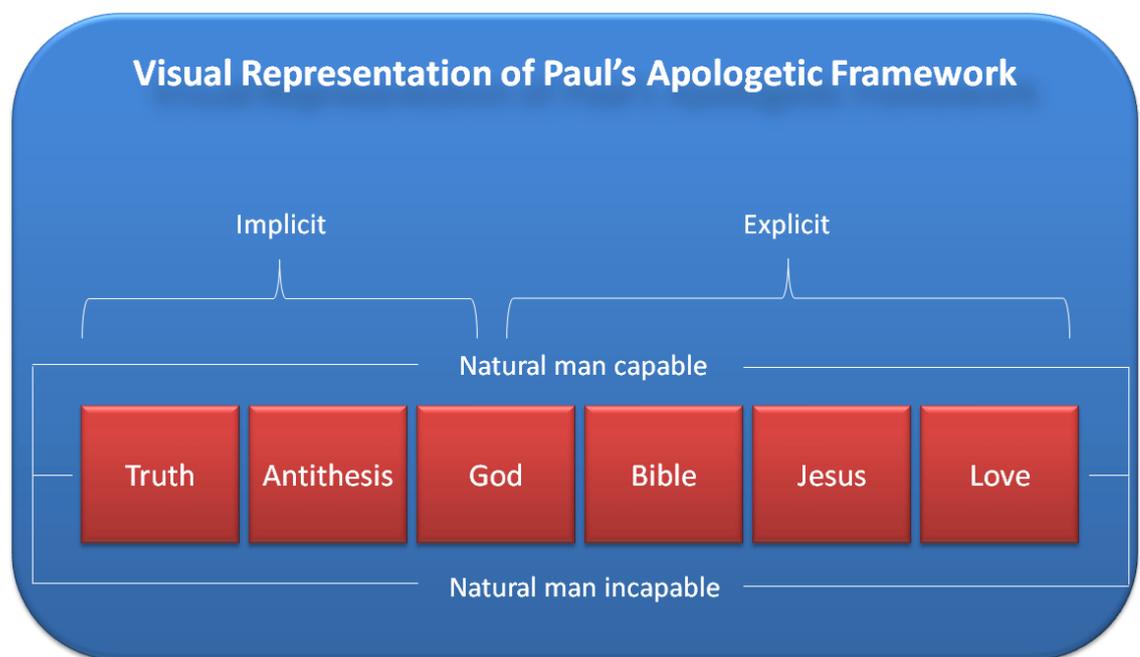


Figure 1: Topical Perspective of Paul's Apologetic Framework.

Let me now explain the above graphical representation of Paul's apologetics in detail. The above visual represents topics contained within Paul's framework and should be viewed as a sliding set of subjects with respect to where the modern day Christian apologists should start with a nonbeliever once they have determined their underlying presuppositions and common ground. This is analogous to Paul's "truth anchor" concept that was documented in Chapter Four (cf. 4.4.2). The six anchors or discussion topics above are all addressed by the three witness apologetics components of Paul's message, method, and

manner, and are broken up in two main ways. The first three topics that are implicit in the message of the Pauline framework corresponds to the Apostle's presuppositions that were covered in Chapter 4 (cf. 4.3.3 for a discussion of supporting information). Most notably are the concepts of truth, antithesis, and the arguments that lead to the facts of God's existence. Second, there are explicit topics that were specifically mentioned in the Pauline speeches and epistles (cf. 4.3.1), which focus on the Scriptures, its message concerning humankind's sin, and the work of Jesus Christ. Finally, there is the key component of Paul's character and the love that he commanded the Christian community manifest (cf. 4.5).

Next, there are dimensions to each topic that humankind, unaided by the Holy Spirit, should be able to process when presented them by the Christian apologist. This position can be supported both Biblically and philosophically. When Paul wrote, "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised"(1 Cor. 2:14), did he mean that natural humanity could not understand the concept of truth, that the opposite of true is false, or that there is a Creator? As demonstrated by the Pauline speeches in Acts and the presuppositions of Paul's message that were outlined in Chapter Four (cf. 4.3), the evidence does not seem to support such conclusions. Paul consistently confronted unbelievers with logically based arguments, rooted in truth, and proclaimed a Creator to Gentile audiences who had no concept of the Jewish Yahweh. However, it is apparent that while there are dimensions to each and every discussion topic that the non-Christian can grasp, the evidence in Chapter Four also showed that the Holy Spirit's intervention is necessary in each topic so that a person can be brought to full faith in Christ (cf. 4.4.1.1).

This naturally leads to the question of what can a non-Christian understand of each component in *tria martus* apologetics and what can they not embrace without the Holy Spirit's aid? The table below represents an attempt to answer this question by summarizing each dimension with respect to what a non-

Christian can and cannot comprehend on his/her own, with either Biblical or extra-biblical support references being supplied.

Topic	What natural humanity can understand	What natural humanity cannot understand/do without the Spirit
Truth	That absolute truth exists (cf. Groothuis, 2000, Chapter Four; also Chapter 4 of this work, 4.3.3)	Receive the love of the truth so as to be saved (2 Thess. 2:10); instead they suppress truth (Rom. 1:18)
Antithesis	That the opposite of true is false (cf. Geisler & Turek, 2004, Chapter Two; also Chapter 4 of this work, 4.3.3)	Understand the antithesis and enmity that exists between the unbeliever and believer's worldviews (Gen. 3:15) and accept that the exclusivistic claims of Christianity are true (1 Cor. 2:14)
God	That a Creator God exists (Rom. 1; Chapter Four, 4.3.1)	Exhibit trust in the God that exists or seek Him (Rom. 3:11)
Bible	That the Bible is a book which accurately portrays historical events and meets various tests of validity (e.g. bibliographical; cf. Bruce, 2009; Chapter Four of this work, 4.3.1)	Accept that the Bible proclaims the only message of salvation (the gospel) available to unbelievers; it is foolishness to them (1 Cor. 1:18)
Jesus	That a historical person named Jesus of Nazareth lived and the events surrounding His life are very plausible (cf. Habermas, 1996)	Accept the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is their Messiah, the Son of God, and the One who died for their sins so they may spend eternity with God; instead humanity rejects their Savior (1 Cor. 2:8)
Love	Love is better than hate or	Love God so that they will obey

	indifference (cf. Chapter Four, 4.5)	Him from the heart (2 Thess. 3:2)
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Table 4: Dimensions of the Pauline framework that natural humanity can/cannot understand without the aid of the Holy Spirit.

A couple of examples and illustrations may help to clarify and support the positions taken in Table 4. On the matter of truth, when a person makes the claim “All truth is relative”, they have just made an absolute truth claim. Using logic or philosophical reasoning, a person can be made to understand that their position is self-defeating; there is no need for the Holy Spirit to help them in this regard. However, the Biblical evidence shows that a person cannot receive the love of God’s truth without the Spirit’s intervention (cf. Rom. 8:6-7; 2 Thess. 2:10).

As to the subject of antithesis, when a person embracing philosophical pluralism denies the exclusivistic position taken by the Christian apologist, through logical argumentation, they can be shown that their stance is self-defeating. They may espouse that all religious positions are true, but by denying the Christian’s exclusivistic truth claims, they are affirming that antithesis does exist in matters of spirituality. Such a conclusion does not necessitate the Holy Spirit’s work. However, Scripture states that a non-Christian cannot embrace Christian truth claims without the help of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14).

When it comes to the matter of the Bible: can the non-Christian be presented with the techniques for judging whether a historical work should be trusted as to its validity? Can they grasp the methodology of biographical, internal evidence, and external evidence tests? The evidence suggests that yes, it is possible, because historians do such work every day. But the Biblical data shows that without the Spirit of God, the same non-believer will not be able to bow before the truth proclaimed in Scripture, the gospel, and submit their will

to the message written between its pages (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14). They will not be able to grasp the significance of the Bible; it will be foolishness to them.

This is not a semi-Pelagian stance by any means, but rather an indictment of what humankind's responsibility before God actually is and an assurance that a person is in dire need of the Spirit's quickening before a person can come to faith in Christ. Nor am I saying that an unbeliever *will* submit to the truth of what they are capable of recognizing. Their worldview is in complete antithesis to the Christian worldview, and the enmity between the two (established by God Himself as stated in Gen. 3:15) will manifest itself in the unbeliever so they reject the Christian's arguments.

The paradigm described above agrees with Schaeffer's position on natural humankind's responsibility before God and how the Holy Spirit works with those He has called to Himself. Schaeffer believed that how he engaged in apologetics mirrored what the Apostle wrote about in Romans 1 and 2. In the end Schaeffer assumed that unbelievers will be judged guilty because they could understand enough of God's general revelation (e.g. truth, antithesis, the fact that God existed) and that such revelation "reveals knowledge to the rational person - who can't escape his rationality even though he is a rebel" (Schaeffer, 1998A: 31-32). But Schaeffer did not believe that an apologist established that Christianity is true by rational argument, after which the Holy Spirit then took over to lead the person fully into faith. For Schaeffer there existed a "constant interchange of faith and reason all the time" (Follis, 2006: 96).

This position is also supported by Aquinas who wrote: "Since man's nature is dependent on a higher nature, natural knowledge does not suffice for its perfection, and some supernatural knowledge is necessary . . . just as man assents to first principles by the natural light of his intellect [the beginnings of Paul's framework], so does a virtuous man, by the habit of virtue, judge rightly of things concerning that virtue" (Aquinas, 1999: 69). Aquinas also agreed that

there indeed are aspects of God that can be known through natural reason and general revelation. He writes: "The existence of God and other like truths about God, which can be known by natural reason are not articles of faith, but are preambles to the articles . . . . When the existence of a cause is demonstrated from an effect, this effect takes the place of the definition of the cause in proving the cause's existence. This is especially the case in regard to God" (Aquinas, 1999: 124-125).

### 6.2.2 A Key Witness: The Resurrection

The above begs the question: given the dimensional chasm that exists between what non-Christians can and cannot understand, is there a part of Paul's *apologia* (i.e. a fact or event) the Christian apologist can focus on that greatly emphasizes both dimensions? As was more fully developed in Chapter Four and briefly noted in the previous section, the main instigator and finisher of faith in the unbeliever is the Holy Spirit, which Paul made clear in the key verse I have presented as the cornerstone of his apologetic, 1 Thess. 1:5. It is only the Holy Spirit who brings about the "full conviction" of faith spoken of by Paul in this verse, 'A state of complete certainty' (Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, 2000). This is a condition with which Aquinas concurs: "Faith signifies the assent of the intellect to that which is believed. . . . Now if this be accompanied by doubt and fear of the opposite side, there will be opinion; while, if there be certainty and no fear of the other side, there will be faith" (Aquinas, 1999: 48).

However, there is a primary event that bridges both general revelation and the 'unseen' of the gospel that serves as the central point of evidence for moving a non-believer to being a believer, and that is the resurrection of Christ. I agree with Bruce Little (as well as other apologists/theologians such as Habermas and Licona, cf. 2004) that the resurrection is the climactic, historically verifiable God-act that verifies who God is (according to the truth-claims of Jesus) and which forms the core evidence of the gospel. Therefore, it is capable of serving

as the apex of the Christian apologist's evidentially-based argument (Little, 1984: 117).

In making the above statements, I do not mean to imply that the resurrection is the only historical proof point (coupled with the Holy Spirit) that can move an unbeliever to faith in Christ, but that it is the one highlighted in nearly every address by Paul in Acts, plays most prominently in his corpus (e.g. 1 Cor. 15; Rom. 1:4) when it comes to the Apostle bridging the gap between the 'seen' of this world and the unseen world of faith with unbelievers, and has resulted in some high profile commitments to Christianity (e.g. Frank Morrison, 1958). Moreover, I am not arguing that this makes Paul an evidential-resurrection apologist, but instead presented data in Chapter Four (cf. 4.6.1) that showed the Apostle's apologetic methodology is more eclectic and cannot be truly classified by any of the categories used to describe the different apologetic approaches in use today.

### **6.2.3 Using the Pauline Framework to Address Postmodernist Challenges**

Although I will expand in greater detail how the Pauline apologetic framework may be used to evangelize the unbeliever in subsequent sections in this chapter, the following will serve as a condensed guide for how the Apostle's *apologia* may be put to use. Paul's framework not only addresses all relevant worldviews and philosophies alive in Postmodernism, but also speaks to the key life questions that today's postmodernist asks. Nancy Pearcey defines these as (1) Creation: how did it all begin? Where did we come from? (2) Fall: what went wrong? What is the source of evil and suffering? (3) Redemption: what can we do about it? How can the world be set right again? (Pearcey, 2004: 25). Apologist Ravi Zacharias classifies these as (1) Origins; (2) Morality; (3) Meaning; (4) Destiny (Zacharias, 1998: 219). The following table proposes a summarization of where the various philosophies, worldviews, or competing religions are countered by the Christian apologist obtaining agreement with the unbeliever on a particular discussion topic/truth claim in the Pauline

framework (e.g. Jesus is the Son of God) and what key life questions are answered by the same.

Topic	Defuses Worldview/Religion...	Answers Life Question Of...
Truth	Hard Agnosticism Relativism Postmodernism Skepticism	
Antithesis	Pluralism	
God	Atheism	Origin
Bible	Pantheism Panentheism Polytheism Relative Linguistics Soft Agnosticism	Morality
Jesus	Islam Judaism	
Love	Deism	Meaning Destiny

Table 5: How the Pauline apologetic framework answers various worldviews and competing religions.

A case in point might be when an apologist obtains an agreement with an unbeliever that God exists: the person now knows the answer to their origin (i.e. they are not the product of chance and material matter). The above table serves as a general guide in using the “truth anchors” concept of the Apostle Paul identified in Chapter Four. For example, a Christian apologist may encounter an unbeliever who has no problem with absolute truth or antithesis, but is not sure if God really exists (or what kind of god exists). The apologist would then bypass the first two topics in the framework and begin dialoging with the unbeliever about general revelation and perhaps even utilize various theistic proofs for God that may be used to awaken the *sensus divinitatis* within

them. However, if the unbeliever rejects that truth can be known, the apologist will have to begin with the concept of truth and move forward in the paradigm. One important thing to note now, however, is the above table does not pretend to dictate what *will* happen with an unbeliever who is presented with valid arguments for a particular topic, only what is possible. It should not be forgotten that Paul himself experienced much disappointment and hardship in his evangelistic endeavors when employing his framework (e.g. Acts 9:23-25, 9:29, 13:8, 13:45, 13:50, 14:2-5, 14:19, and many others).

#### **6.2.4 Summary**

This section has served as a brief introduction to two key points. First, how the Pauline apologetic framework may be applied in postmodernist evangelistic encounters. Second, the delineation between what natural human beings can understand by their own reason versus what the Holy Spirit must do to produce true saving faith. Paul's *apologia* provides Christians with the best way to drive out a bad worldview: offer a good one in its place.

In the next section, I will begin to discuss in detail how Paul's *apologia* speaks to the rational dimension of the postmodernist. Data will be presented that shows the apologetic task is a spiritual conflict that is first and foremost a theological one: divine truth versus worldly and/or demonic error. The goal of the apologist in such a situation is the correction of falsehoods and not destruction of people (cf. 2 Cor. 10:3-5).

### 6.3 APPEALING TO THE POSTMODERNIST AS A RATIONAL BEING

From the research gathered on Paul's message in Chapters Three and Four, we can draw a few conclusions that will help in determining how to approach the postmodernist of today with Paul's apologetic framework. I will frame these conclusions in terms of what Paul was and was not when it came to presenting his *apologia* to unbelievers.

With respect to how Paul could be described, it can be argued from information presented in Chapter Four that Paul was a person of reason and rational thought, which came through quite clearly in his message. Six times in Acts (17:2, 17:17, 18:4, 18:19, 19:8, 19:9), the author (Luke) records that Paul "reasoned" or was "reasoning" (διαλέγομαι) with unbelievers. Next, the Biblical evidence shows that Paul was most definitely a person who believed in the use of various evidences in his message, especially those that were of a historical nature (e.g. the resurrection). Data presented in Chapter Four showed that Paul was a presuppositionalist in some respects, especially when it came to prerequisites which he expected his audiences to implicitly adhere, for example that history is knowable. Another example would be his understanding of the antithesis that existed between the Christian and non-Christian worldview (i.e. Augustine's *Civitas Dei* and *Civitas Mundi* or city of God and city of the world). The Pauline corpus also reveals that the Apostle believed the Bible was God's revealed Word (cf. 4.3.3). Moreover, Paul was a person who held to a firm conviction of fulfilled Biblical prophecy, especially when it came to the person of the Messiah. Finally, while Paul may have not explicitly used theistic proof for God as would a modern-day classical apologist, he implicitly utilized such evidences (Acts 14; Acts 17; Rom. 1 & 2) and therefore it is likely that he would not have ruled out these proofs if his audience was in need of hearing such arguments.

In regard to things that Paul was not, although he believed in supplying evidence in his message, he was not a pure evidentialist in the apologetic sense of the word. As was more thoroughly argued in Chapters Three and Four, Paul believed the Spirit was the efficient cause of belief and that any evidences or arguments he supplied were simply sufficient causes for assent. But Paul's use of evidence spells out the fact that he was not a fideist who expected his audience to believe simply by faith in him alone. In fact, the author of Acts seems to laud the Bereans in Acts 17 for verifying Paul's message with the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). Finally, Biblical evidence (e.g. Gal. 1:11-12) shows that Paul was not a rationalist in the academic philosophical sense of the word. Propositional revelation was certainly a hallmark of the Apostle's apologetic.

However, although Paul was not a rationalist, he most certainly utilized rational thought and logic with his audience. This brings us to the first dimension of the postmodernist that can be addressed by Paul's apologetic framework: he/she is a rational being. This being the case, the postmodernist possesses the capability to comprehend and process dimensions of the salvific message that Paul preached. Let us now look at each component of Paul's framework – his message, method, and manner – and discuss how each applies to the postmodernist's rational dimension.

### **6.3.1 The Value of Paul's Message**

One of the primary values Paul's message supplies to the postmodernist is that it provides an *objective basis* for the *subjective experience* of salvation. Even in light of the noetic effects of sin, the message of Paul should appeal to the rational being of today's unbeliever who still bears the image of the Creator and desires an actual reasonable foundation for his or her belief. Data provided in Chapter Four showed that Paul believed this as he consistently worked to show how the resurrection of Jesus and other historical events gave a reasonable basis for why someone should believe his message. Likewise, Francis Schaeffer noted that true Christian faith rests on content. He held that believing is not the basis

for being saved; the basis is the work of Christ with Christian faith always being turned outward to an objective Person who existed in space/time history (Schaeffer, 1990A: 146). Such a historical Person brings a tangible foundation for the message of the gospel.

However, even though Schaeffer's statement should not cause friction within the Christian community, it should be noted upfront that whenever an appeal is made by the apologist to supply a message to the reason of humankind, various critics from Christendom voice concern (some vehemently so) and label the approach as rationalism. Schaeffer, who was a firm believer in taking a rational (but not rationalistic) approach to evangelism, garnered critics such as Clark Pinnock, Richard Pierard, E. R. Geehan, Greg Bahnsen and others who charged him with going against Reformed Theology, embracing human wisdom, and negating the Spirit's work within humankind's mind and heart (Follis, 2006: 73-83).

Another charge in this same vein is that a rational tract and message in apologetics appeals only to intellectuals and not to common people. Such critics nod in agreement with Gilson who asked, "after all, is not the way to heaven open to the most ignorant as well as to the most learned?" (Gilson, 2002: 75), and cite 1 Cor. 1:26 as proof that God does not restrict Himself only to the intellectually superior.

However, I consider both these positions to be in error. The evidence in Chapter Four showed that Paul believed a rational and coherent message was helpful in bringing unbelievers to faith in Christ. With respect to Schaeffer, inherent in his approach lay a confidence in the rational ability of people, with him declaring "if we give up the rational, all is lost" (Schaeffer, 1990A: 123). This confidence stemmed from his conviction, which he shared with Calvin, that the image of God was not completely destroyed in the Fall. This is a principle we also see within Scripture itself and in Paul's writings. As seen in Chapter Four (cf. 4.3.3), Paul routinely verifies that God is and then clarifies who God is by appealing to

a rational argument based on evidence. This being the case, the evidence supports the fact that Paul held to the position that the image of the rational God was clearly not destroyed in his audience. But even so, Schaeffer (and Paul) did not take a purely rationalistic approach to evangelism. Schaeffer stated his position on the matter thus: "Although rationality is important, it should never become exclusively so. Rationality is not the end of the matter" (Schaeffer, 1990A: 123).

Speaking to the charge of intellectual elitism, C. S. Lewis' states the following against confusing rationality and intellectualism: "uneducated people are not irrational people" (Lewis, 1996: 76). Schaeffer echoes Lewis' remark in this statement: "I am convinced that these people [common men and women] often have the same questions as the intellectual; the only thing is that they do not articulate them, or if they do articulate them it is not in the same terminology" (Schaeffer, 1990A: 177).

Returning now to the initial argument as to why Paul's message is valuable for the rational postmodernist, there are a number of aspects in this area of Paul's message that should be highlighted. First, the basis of Paul's message makes the truth claims of Christianity open to authentication. As an example, in 1 Cor. 15, Paul references more than five hundred brethren that had seen Christ after the resurrection, with the implication being "If you do not believe me, ask one of them." Far from being something as Nietzsche described ("'Faith' means the will to avoid knowing what is true" (Nietzsche, 1920)) the message of Paul supplied reason and evidence so an unbeliever could reach the conclusion that something such as the story of Christ could be true.

This is in contrast with how many postmodernists view Christianity and theology in general. Schaeffer noticed just such a trend and stated that the best way to describe this postmodernist concept of modern theology is to say that it is faith in faith, rather than faith directed to an object which is actually there (Schaeffer, 1990A: 65). He argued that modern humankind cannot talk about

the object of their faith, only about the faith itself, but that in Christianity the value of that faith depends upon the object towards which the faith is directed. It looks outward to the God who is there, and to the Christ who in history died upon the cross once for all, finished the work of atonement, and on the third day rose again in space/time history (which corresponds to Paul's great emphasis on history in his speeches recorded in Acts) (Schaeffer, 1990A: 65). Therefore, such things make the Christian faith open to discussion and verification.

In addition, this characteristic of Christianity – its verifiability – was also a litmus test in the apologetic methodology of Edward John Carnell (Carnell, 1956: 109-113) who, like Paul and Schaeffer, also believed in an eclectic or non-normative approach to apologetics that was adapted to the times and audience (Carnell, 1960: 7). For Schaeffer, it was his compassion for the individual person that led him “to tailor an apologetic strategy to each person he met instead of offering a canned systematic presentation or pre-packaged methodology” (Burson & Walls, 1998: 151). Such an approach speaks against a pure Van Til presuppositional methodology (one that says you cannot speak to an unbeliever without belief in the Triune God), because it does not give an adequate framework for ascertaining facts and knowledge. It cannot because it removes the possibility of communication at the only two points that can be discussed and verified, which is history and the universe. As Schaeffer argued, it may dress up its position with all kinds of clothes, but it remains irrational and what it is talking about can never really be rationally discussed, because it is no longer open to verification (Schaeffer, 1990A: 101).

As with Paul's framework, Schaeffer argued that such verification was available via the communication of rational knowledge through the gospel message, and that such a thing preceded saving faith, something Biblical evidence supports (e.g. Rom. 10:8-14). God is ontologically prior to everything, yet for humankind, logic is epistemologically prior to God as we use logic and rational thought in making a decision to trust God. In other words, the heart will not long rejoice in

what the mind knows is not true. Schaeffer felt that such a point was crucial in understanding the Bible and for the apologist to say that only that faith which believes God on the basis of knowledge is true faith is to say something which causes an explosion in the postmodernist world (Schaeffer, 1990A: 154).

Next, Biblical evidence shows that the message of Paul never claimed to have a totality of God's truth, but that the message did claim to be 100% true in the truth that it presents. This is a concept that may be more palatable to today's rational postmodernist who is dubious of absolute truth. Paul fully acknowledged, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known"(1 Cor. 13:12, emphasis added). Likewise, Aquinas admitted: "We realize we fall short of fully understanding him" (Aquinas, 1999: 29). Such a position does not undercut a rational conclusion that leads to faith in Christ and, moreover, supports the position of some in the Emerging Church that say Christianity is still a mystery in many respects. Of this type of truth, Lewis says:

"What we believe always remains intellectually possible; it never becomes intellectually compulsive. I have an idea that when this ceases to be so, the world will be ending. We have been warned that all but conclusive evidence against Christianity, evidence that would deceive (if it were possible) the very elect, will appear with Antichrist. And after that, there will be wholly conclusive evidence on the other side. But not, I fancy, till then on either side" (Lewis, 2002: 92).

However, the Christian apologist, taking a cue from Paul, should not back away from the fact that the truth being presented in the message matches and corresponds to reality; it is not mere preference, but real. This is something also agreed to by Schaeffer who said in today's Postmodernism, the starting point for evangelism is ensuring the unbeliever is educated on the concept of truth (Schaeffer, 1990a, 155). This runs contrary to the position held by Professor Wesley Ariarajah who said: "However convinced we are about a faith-claim, it has to be given as a claim of faith and not as truth in the absolute sense" (Ariarajah, 1989: 67). Using the same attitude toward truth as Ariarajah, William Cantwell Smith states he speaks to unbelievers in this way: "I do not

say that God was revealed in Jesus Christ . . . I do say that God has been revealed to me in Jesus Christ" (Smith, 1981: 174). Neither is truth seen as what Rorty prescribes: Rorty says truth is whatever we let ourselves get away with saying (Rorty, 1979: 176). However, as Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga notes, if we all let each other get away with saying that there just isn't any such thing as AIDS, then on this Rortyesque view it would be true that there isn't any such thing as AIDS; but if it were true that there is no such thing as AIDS, then there would be no such thing. So all we have to do to get rid of AIDS, or cancer, or poverty is let each other get away with saying there is no such thing (Plantinga, 2000: 430).

If an apologist wishes to follow Paul's framework, they must make sure that the individual understands that real truth is being discussed and not something vaguely religious which seems to work psychologically (cf. 4.3.3). Apologists must make certain that the unbeliever understands that real guilt before God exists, and the message of Christianity is not merely offering relief for their guilt feelings. As Paul did when communicating his message, they must ensure that the skeptic understands that actual history is being discussed, and that the death of Jesus was not just an ideal or a symbol but a fact of space and time. Schaeffer held that until the non-believer understands the importance of these three things (real truth, real guilt, and real events), they are not ready to become a Christian (Schaeffer, 1990A: 139).

Implicit in such a message is the idea that the only reason to believe anything is because it is true. In this vein, Christianity should not be viewed as a series of truths in the plural, but rather truth spelled with a capital 'T'. It is truth about reality, not just about religious things. Paul's Biblical Christianity is the intellectual holding of that total truth and then living in the light of that Truth (Pearcey, 2004: 15). This foundation of truth is what allows the apologist to credibly supply answers, which is something Aquinas observes: "Since faith rests upon infallible truth, and since the contrary of a truth can never be

demonstrated, it is clear that the proofs brought against faith are not demonstrations, but arguments that can be answered” (Aquinas, 1999: 19).

This leads to the next value contained within Paul’s message, which is the conviction that his message conveyed truth via language, which was accomplished through the dissemination of spiritual thoughts with spiritual words (1 Cor. 2:13). Note that this concept was never explicitly or philosophically defended by Paul in either Acts or his corpus, and is also something not directly argued by contemporary apologists such as Schaeffer. Instead, this is where one of the presuppositional veins of Schaeffer’s apologetics becomes visible. He asked: “Would it be unlikely that this personal God who is there and made humankind in His own image as a verbalizer, in such a way that he can communicate horizontally to other men on the basis of propositions and languages . . . would communicate to man on the basis of propositions? The answer is, no” (Schaeffer, 1990B: 325). Schaeffer believed that God had established the revelation of the Bible in history and did not give it (as He could have done) in the form of a theological textbook. Having set the revelation in history that was communicated in human language, what sense then would it make for God to give humankind a revelation in which the history was wrong or utterly incommunicable? (Schaeffer, 1990A: 100). Such a mindset is certainly presuppositionalism, but it is not presented in dogmatic, hard form – Schaeffer just asked his listeners ‘why wouldn’t such a thing make sense?’

But key to such a tactic was Schaeffer’s belief that the apologist must learn the non-Christian’s use of language so that he/she understands what the apologist intends to convey: “If the word (or phrase) we are in the habit of using is no more than an orthodox evangelical cliché which has become a technical term among Christians, then we should be willing to give it up when we step outside our own narrow circle and talk to the people around us” (Schaeffer, 1990A: 130). Schaeffer argued that the postmodernist does not fully understand terms like salvation and guilt. He indicated that if he only had an hour to talk to

someone about the gospel, he would spend forty-five minutes showing him his real dilemma: that he is morally dead because he is separated from the God who exists. Then he said he would take ten or fifteen minutes to tell him the gospel. Each person, said Schaeffer, must be dealt with as an individual, not as a case or statistic or machine (Follis, 2006: 48).

Such an approach is very (if not exactly) similar to the way Paul engaged his Gentile audiences in Acts (e.g. 24:25), and what he wrote about in Colossians: "Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person." (Col. 4:6). Like Paul, Schaeffer argued that if the apologist wants the postmodernist to understand what they are saying, they needed to know their thought-forms and communicate accordingly, and that if such did not occur, "the unchangeable principles of Christianity will fall on deaf ears" (Schaeffer, 1990C: 269-270). This point is also acknowledged by Aquinas who stated that teachers of the faith have obligations to the learned and the unlearned, as is clear from Rom. 1:14. Therefore they ought to talk in such a way that they can be understood by both the great and the simple, that is, without obscure language (Aquinas, 1999: 40).

The last point that should be noted about the message contained within Paul's framework is that it does bring with it a demand of human responsibility that mixes with God's sovereignty. This was something also emphasized by Schaeffer. Bryan Follis argues that the balance accorded by Schaeffer to the role of the Holy Spirit and human responsibility in communicating the gospel was in some ways a more accurate reflection of the traditional Reformed approach than that prevailing among Calvinists of Schaeffer's generation who were so focused on God's sovereignty that they failed to give proper attention to the human dimension of apologetics and evangelism (Follis, 2006: 52). If it is true that the Church of Jesus Christ grows through the preaching of the gospel – a proclamation that has an authoritative and credible message – it would seem logical that the chief strategy of the Church would be to recruit, properly equip, and train more gospel preachers and apologists (Jensen, 2000: 203). Such people

can then adequately deliver a message that will satisfy both the heart and mind of a rational person who has been created in the image of God.

### 6.3.2 The Value of Paul's Method

In regard to the value Paul's method brings to the rational person, one of its primary contributions is that it supplies logic needed for recognition of truth especially for the understanding of antithesis, which is necessary to successfully counteract the doctrine of religious pluralism (a challenge covered in Chapter 5). The issue is that when one turns to something, he/she must at the same time turn from something else, as Paul says: "For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God"(1 Thess. 1:9). For Paul, the gospel was not both/and but either/or, and his method (the second component in three witness apologetics) contained logical argumentation that drove the importance of that point home with his listeners (cf. 4.4.2). Agreeing with Paul is Schaeffer who affirms antithesis and identifies the current problem with antithesis and Postmodernism to be one of presuppositions. He writes:

"It was indeed unfortunate that our Christian 'thinkers' in the time before the shift took place [to Postmodernism] and the chasm was fixed did not teach and preach with a clear grasp of presuppositions. . . . The floodwaters of secular thought and liberal theology overwhelmed the Church because the leaders did not understand the importance of combating a false set of presuppositions. . . . The use of classical apologetics before this shift took place was effective only because non-Christians were functioning, on the surface, on the same presuppositions, even if they had an inadequate base for them. . . . So, if a man got up to preach the gospel and said, 'Believe this, it is true' those who heard would have said, 'Well, if that is so, then its opposite is false'. The presupposition of antithesis pervaded men's entire mental outlook. We must not forget that historic Christianity stands on a basis of antithesis" (Schaeffer, 1990A: 7-8).

Schaeffer was known for his warnings against a move from antithesis to synthesis and pluralism, although his basis for such a move (Schaeffer blamed Hegel) was likely incorrect. Nevertheless, Schaeffer wrote that if apologists

failed to follow Paul's lead on antithesis, if it was removed, then two outcomes would result. First, Christianity in the next generation as true Christianity would be weakened. Secondly, apologists would be communicating only with that diminishing part of the community which still thought in terms of the older concept of truth. The final conclusion, he felt, was that if Paul's model of antithesis was not followed, many would respond with their own interpretation of the gospel, in their own relativistic thought-forms, including a concept of psychological guilt-feelings rather than of true moral guilt before the holy, living God (Schaeffer, 1990A: 196).

Such an antithetical stance, admittedly, may cause some postmodernists to bristle. For example, Ariarajah says: "exclusive claims, presented as absolute truths, only result in alienation" (Ariarajah, 1989: 28) and that Paul's epistles are: "'statements of faith about Jesus, the Christ. They derive their meaning in the context of faith, and have no meaning outside the community of faith'" (Ariarajah, 1989: 23). For Ariarajah, it is fine for a person to say 'this is true' as long as one does not add, 'therefore, that is false', which is not a stance endorsed by the Apostle Paul. Indeed, it is one that is countered by his method, which makes use of the logical law of non-contradiction. This law, as I presented in this chapter's introduction, is part of what the natural postmodernist person is capable of understanding via general revelation alone, but the willful assent to it in the matter of Christianity's exclusivistic faith claims requires the intervening power of the Holy Spirit. So, as with the message of Paul, there is a responsibility on the part of the apologist to boldly affirm the use of logic and non-contradiction in evangelistic encounters, and a need for God's Spirit to create a willing affection in the heart of the unbeliever for the rational proclamation of the Christian's anti-pluralist position.

As outlined in Chapter Five (cf. 5.2), a basic challenge of Postmodernism is that religion is not considered an objective truth to which we submit, but only a matter of personal taste which we choose from many different choices that are considered equally valid. This, as was chronicled in Chapter Two, is not unlike

the mindset of the syncretistic faiths that Paul encountered in his day, yet their presence did not cause him to shy away from his exclusivistic truth claims or the use of logic as evidenced in Acts 17:3 where the Apostle is “explaining and giving evidence”, in Acts 19:8 where he is “persuading”, and in Acts 28:23 where Paul is “explaining” and attempting to “persuade” (cf. Chapter Four, section 4.4.2).

Given this, the apologist must be ready to reprove the logic of the postmodernist who supports pluralism and appeal to his/her rational capabilities that have been given to them by God so they may clearly see the issues that exist with pluralism as well as concepts such as relative truth. Christian apologist and theologian Norman Geisler has philosophically demonstrated that reliance on antithesis and logic (as Paul used) is fully backed by natural reason and rationale, with such rationale being recognizable by today’s postmodernist who embraces relative truth, relative linguistics, and pluralistic thought. He offers these examples to make plain his point:

- The Claim of Relativism: “We cannot know absolute truth.” Relativism Refuted: We know that we cannot know absolute truth.
- The Claim of Pluralism: “No view is exclusively true.” The Self-refutation: It claims that its view (that no view is exclusively true) is exclusively true. The claim and refutation can also be restated as such: The Claim: “Opposites (e.g., A is non-A) can both be true.” 2. The Self-Refutation: They hold that the opposite of this statement (that opposites can both be true) cannot be true.
- The Claim of Anti-Objectivism: “There are no objectively true statements.” The Self-Refutation: It is an objectively true statement that there are no objectively true statements.
- The Claim of Fideism: “There are no reasons for what we believe.” The Self-Refutation: There are good reasons for believing there are no good reasons for what we believe.

- The Claim of Agnosticism: “Knowledge is a luxury beyond our means.” The Self-Refutation: We have the luxury of knowing that we can’t have the luxury of knowing.
- The Claim of Conventionalism: “There is no objective meaning.” The Self-Refutation: It is objectively meaningful to assert that there is no objective meaning.
- The Claim of Anti-Realism “There is no real world now that can be known.” The Self-Refutation: We know it is really true now (i.e., true in the real world now) that there is no real world now that can be known.
- The Claim of Post-Orthodoxy (deals primarily with the Emerging Church): “We should not insist on being right about doctrine.” The Self-Refutation: We insist on being right in our doctrine that we should not insist on being right in our doctrine.
- The Claim of Anti-Propositionalism: “Our view of the Christian faith must not be fixed on propositional truth (doctrine).” The Self-Refutation: We must be fixed on the propositional truth that we should not be fixed on propositional truth (Geisler, 2008).

Agreeing with Geisler is theologian and professor C. Ben Mitchell who recommends that today’s apologists pursue a similar strategy with their unbelieving audience and logically demonstrate that the most critical problem for ideological pluralism is that it turns and devours itself, and is rapidly self-refuting. That is the problem with a universal solvent: where does one store it? By the ideological pluralist’s own admission, no one can (or at least, should) claim to know truth and therefore all beliefs are equally valid. Self-avowed pluralists who espouse this pluralist doctrine thus become a form of imperialism, denying to others what they themselves claim to have, this is, freedom of choice (Mitchell, 2001: 149-150).

To further help the postmodernist who embraces pluralism and rejects exclusivity, Dr. Harold Netland and Keith Johnson recommend four categories

of questions that help illustrate the concept of antithesis in the doctrines of the various world religions:

- What does this religion teach regarding the nature of the ultimate reality?
- What does this religion teach about the fate of individuals at death?
- What is the universal problem, according to this religion, facing humanity?
- What universal solution does this religion propose for this problem?

Netland and Johnson argue that when the pluralist recognizes that all religions cannot be true at the same time, he or she is generally more open to considering evidence for one particular faith (Netland & Johnson, 2000: 59). Interestingly, when one reviews the content of Paul's messages, one will find that the Apostle explicitly or implicitly asks or covers all four questions in his proclamations of the Christian gospel chronicled in the Book of Acts, expounds on each in detail throughout his epistles, and relies on antithesis to ensure his audience understands the exclusivistic, either/or position of Christianity:

- What does this religion teach regarding the nature of the ultimate reality? (Acts 14:15, 17:4; 1 Cor. 8:5; Eph. 4:6; Col. 1:16).
- What does this religion teach about the fate of individuals at death? (Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16, 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:8, 5:10; Phil. 1:23; 2 Thess. 2:12; 2 Tim. 4:1).
- What is the universal problem, according to this religion, facing humanity? (Rom. 1:18-23, 3:23, 3:9).
- What solution does this religion proposes for this problem? (Acts 13:38-39, 16:31, 17:30; Rom. 3:28, 10:9).

Once the questions of Netland and Johnson have been covered, one key point that apologists of today should not omit in their discussion with the postmodernist is that, in the end, all religions are exclusivistic at their core.

Helping the postmodernist see this reality, as Netland and Johnson argue, helps set the stage for the unbeliever to listen to why Christianity's truth claims are rational and not synonymous with other religion's doctrines.

Perhaps equally important, reaching such a 'truth anchor' with unbelievers helps them form an externally rational position from what can be considered to be a former irrational pluralistic stance. Plantinga argues that a major step toward faith in Christ is settling into an externally rational epistemology; that it is possible for unbelievers to be justified and internally rational in their beliefs, but be externally irrational and thus wholly without warrant. Plantinga maintains that a belief is externally rational only if it is produced by cognitive faculties that are functioning properly and successfully aimed at truth (Plantinga, 2000: 204).

This would mean that an underlying part of this process is agreeing to the concept of antithesis. Moreover, Biblical evidence suggests that Paul demonstrated the same convictions, whether it was telling the Corinthian believers they cannot partake of both the table of the Lord and demons (1 Cor. 10:21) or his admonition to the Galatians that they cannot embrace the gospel he had originally brought them and a different one that came from the Judaizers (Gal. 1:6-10). For Paul, antithesis extended beyond the simple recognition that the opposite of true is false; it was a reality of two worldviews (Christianity and the world) that could never be reconciled any more than darkness can be reconciled with light (2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:8; Col. 1:13; 1 Thess. 5:5). If today's apologist wishes to follow Paul, they need to be ready to do the same with worldviews or religions that differ from Christianity and demonstrate that the core teachings of varying faiths are all exclusivistic and cannot be synthesized. Such a position is demonstrated by the poet Steve Turner in his work "Creed": "We believe that all religions are basically the same - at least the one that we read was. They all believe in love and goodness. They only differ on matters of creation, sin, heaven, hell, God, and salvation" (Zacharias, 2004: 42-44).

This understanding (antithesis), which is aided by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13), protects the postmodernist from being someone that Paul warned about who is "always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7). Note that this is different than simply worldly intelligence – a fact called out by Plantinga: “many who don’t believe in God know much. But that is only because they don’t accurately think through the consequences of this rejection. Once they do, they will lose their knowledge; here, therefore, is another of those cases where, by learning more, one comes to know less” (Plantinga, 2000: 240).

### 6.3.3 The Value of Paul’s Manner

In regard to the value that Paul’s manner brings to the rational person, it first supplies existential and personal evidence of the message being true and, in essence, it is pragmatically evidential for those postmodernists who adhere to such a philosophy. As noted in Chapter Five (cf. 5.5), a major challenge Postmodernism brings against Christianity is its disappointment with religion, which says nobody practices what they preach and that the doctrines being proclaimed by a particular faith are not lived out in the lives of its practitioners. Paul’s manner defuses such a charge because the Apostle’s life mirrored his proclaimed message in word and in deed (cf. 1 Thess. 1:5), and when modeled by contemporary apologists and the Church at large, Paul’s manner shows the rational postmodernist that the Christians’ actions and message are truly synchronized.

In addition to this primary benefit, the conviction of Paul, which was expressed through his manner, also provided help to his *apologia*. This fact seems to suggest that a message delivered under the absolute conviction of the Holy Spirit has greater impact on rational people than one presented that is unsure or believes its stance is one of only many possible truths.

With respect to the first point, given the statistical information already presented in Chapter Five regarding why nonbelievers currently view the

Christian Church with such skepticism (cf. 5.5.2), the evidence implies that the rational postmodernist will (rightly) look to marry the message with the messenger, and if the two cannot be fitted together, they will reject the gospel message. This argument is agreed to by Schaeffer who felt that non-Christians will not take any protestations of truth seriously unless they see by the messenger's actions that they practice truth and antithesis in the unity they try to establish and in their activities (Schaeffer, 1990A: 196).

Moreover, the rational person is looking to those who have embraced the Christian gospel to see if it has indeed brought about the transformation that the message states will happen; in essence they are looking for pragmatic evidence that it is 'working' in their lives. Mark Gauthier, national director in the United States for Campus Crusade for Christ, argues that the postmodernist oftentimes puts the focus of whether to accept a teaching not on propositional arguments and proof, but rather on seeing success in the lives of those who have submitted themselves to the teaching. In the college-aged unbelievers he worked with, Gauthier asked them if they would become Christians if he presented iron-clad evidence that the gospel was true and found that their responses started out as 'yes', but then went to 'no, not really' as they admitted to him that their real litmus test for believing was an evidentially pragmatic proof: "show me how this can change my life; let me see someone else who has found that it works for them" (Gauthier, 2000: 207).

Such a desire emphasizes the fact that the postmodernist is not at all opposed to accepting a message that is transcendent in nature and that the culture remains a spiritual one with many desiring to experience something that is beyond themselves. But at the same time, they do not see a transcendent whole that is overarching in their experiences or thoughts because pluralism and relativism have dominated their cultural landscape. This then leaves them to make sense of the many individual pieces of their personal experience, with the end result being a generation of fragmented people, which leaves life without meaning. Far from being triumphalistic, Gauthier argues that the postmodernist populace

is hungry and needy, and knows it is looking for answers, but it remain skeptical and disillusioned with the promise of former generations that theirs would be a better world (Gauthier, 2000: 207-208).

Such disappointment, however, can be overridden when the unbeliever sees the marriage of a salvific message with lives that provide rational proof that the transformation and joy promised in the gospel actually arise in a person's life who has believed and become a Christian. This fact was emphasized by Paul in his statement made in the cornerstone verse of this thesis – 1 Thess. 1:5 – where the Apostle says: “just as you know what kind of men we *proved* to be among you for your sake” (emphasis added). Paul's life was a living, provable testimony to the rational unbeliever that his message and his life were in total harmony with one another (cf. Chapter Four, section 4.5).

The impact of such a message and life will supply even more weight to the unbeliever when both are presented with “full conviction”, such as Paul had when he presented the totality of his *apologia* (cf. 1 Thess. 1:5). Paul left no room for any evangelistic prospect to adduce from his manner that he was a person of shaky convictions where the gospel was concerned. There is evidence that implies having such strength of conviction can draw even the most skeptical of nonbelievers to consider the gospel when it is properly manifested. As an example, the famous skeptic philosopher David Hume was once observed on his way to hear Britain's George Whitefield preach one of his five o'clock morning messages on Christ. The observer chided Hume: "I didn't think you believed in God." Hume replied, and referred to Whitefield: "I don't. But I am convinced this man does" (Mohler, 2006).

### 6.3.4 Summary

The above evidence demonstrates that Paul's three witness apologetics offers value to the postmodernist who, being made in the image of God, is a rational being and is equipped by God to respond to rational arguments and proof. Beginning with Paul's message, one of its primary benefits is that it supplies an objective basis for the subjective salvation experience. Noting the need to have a rational basis for belief, Plantinga states that a person's beliefs are not within their direct control; that one can't just decide to hold or withhold a belief. As an example, he says, if you were to offer him \$1,000,000 to believe that he was under 30 there is no way, short of mind-altering drugs, he could collect (Plantinga, 2000: 96). This being true, there needs to be a viable, objective foundation that underlies belief. Paul's message contained just such a thing. It was a proclamation that was grounded in space-time history and was not empty of either evidence or rationale.

Both Gilson and Plantinga agree with the need to have an objective basis for belief and note that it guards against embracing something that is not grounded in reality. Gilson says that people can be preached into worshipping any being, from a wholly imaginary one like Zeus to a wholly ridiculous one like the Golden Calf (Gilson, 2002: 86-87). Plantinga, quoting John Locke, states that a person who believes without having any reason for believing may be in love with their own fancies, but the person neither seeks truth as they ought, nor pays the obedience due to their Maker who would have them use those discerning faculties He has given them to avoid mistake and error (Plantinga, 2000: 86). Paul underscores the fact that God has no wish that man reside in error about their Creator, but "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4), which highlights the cognitive aspect of conversion, i.e., individuals must come to understand key truths in order to be converted.

Such a thing does not imply rationalism, but rational thinking; God's revelation does not and should not bow to human reason alone. Plantinga (again relying on Locke) argues that when an apologist looks to reason and rational thought, they do not mean that we must consult reason, and examine whether a proposition revealed from God can be made out by natural principles, and if it cannot, that then it may be rejected. Instead, it means that a truth claim must be consulted by reason and examined whether it be a revelation from God or not and if reason finds it to be revealed from God, reason then declares it truth and makes it one of her dictates (Plantinga, 2000: 81). Agreeing with Plantinga is Professor Stephen Brown who argues that faith needs reason and creation to help it attain a deeper understanding of divine Wisdom, but nevertheless, faith should never cede to a person's reason – that is, it never should be measured, reduced, and judged by reason in order to appear to be reasonable on a person's own terms (Aquinas, 1999: x).

While Paul's message supplies an objective basis for belief, his method provides logic needed for recognition of truth especially for the acknowledgement of antithesis, which is necessary to successfully neutralize the doctrine of religious pluralism. Paul argued his case in a climate just as spiritually confused as exists today, and he never backed away from the exclusivistic claims of Christianity. Instead, he utilized persuading and logical arguments in conjunction with the Holy Spirit's monergistic work within the unbeliever to win them to Christ. Such a work of faith was performed not only in the unbeliever's heart but in their mind as well, as Aquinas notes: "For Augustine says that faith resides in the believer's will. . . . Now vision is in the intellect. Therefore faith is likewise. . . . Now, to believe is immediately an act of the intellect, because the object of that act is the true, which pertains properly to the intellect. Consequently faith, which is the proper principles of that act, must needs reside in the intellect" (Aquinas, 1999: 89).

Finally, Paul's last component in his three witness apologetics – his manner – testifies to a rational person who is looking for existential proof that the

message of transformation being preached through the gospel actually results in transformed lives. Paul reiterated to his Thessalonian audience that his actions proved his message, and went on further in 1 Thess. 2:3-12 to speak of how his love and care for them matched up perfectly with the message he had previously brought. This manner of Paul, as well as his message and method, is well represented in the ministry of Francis Schaeffer whose compassion and love at L'Abri was lived out in his life while his intellectually-based messages were delivered to the residents who came to his shelter. Taking time for each individual was a priority for Schaeffer who said that every honest question must be given an honest answer and that it is unbiblical for anyone to say, 'Just believe' (Schaeffer, 1990A: 189).

Having now examined how Paul's apologetic framework speaks to a postmodernist's rational side, I now turn to how the Apostle's *apologia* reaches out to the spiritual element that resides in a non-Christian.

## **6.4 APPEALING TO THE POSTMODERNIST AS A SPIRITUAL BEING**

As recorded in Acts 17, Paul begins his address to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers assembled on Mars Hill by saying, "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious." If the Apostle could be transported into the current postmodernist culture, he may have revised his opening to be: "People of Postmodernism! I see that in every way you are very spiritual." Contrary to the current wave of visibility that outspoken atheists such as Richard Dawkins (2008), Sam Harris (2008), and others have garnered, the statistical information presented in Chapter Five (cf. 5.5.1) speaks to the fact that the vast majority of the world prizes spirituality and does not rule out a transcendence to life that supersedes the natural world. This being the case, the data would support the fact that the apologist of today who desires to apply Paul's apologetic framework to their evangelistic encounters must approach their audience as not only rational beings, but spiritual beings as well. How does Paul's *apologia*

apply to the spiritual side of an unbeliever? In the subsequent sections, I will show that there are at least three ways Paul's framework pertains to the spiritual individual.

First, Paul's message supplies special propositional revelation necessary for salvation that cannot be obtained via general revelation and human reason alone. Paul explicitly states this fact in Romans when he says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). "Word of Christ" is a synonym for the special revelation contained within the gospel (see exchanges of "Christ" and "God" in various translations, such as the NASB and in various books such as Titus). It is, quite simply, a spiritual message for a spiritual being. Whereas humankind, via general revelation, may be presented with and may assent to arguments that demonstrate God as Creator (the knowledge of which acts as a means of condemnation for that person; cf. Rom 1:18-20), Paul's message becomes the agency to show God as that same humankind's Redeemer and so becomes a means of salvation for them.

Second, Paul's method – specifically the monergistic work of the Holy Spirit that occurs in the life of the unbeliever – performs the most critical function in the repair of each person's *sensus divinitatis* (a term used by Calvin - 1599), which is within them as well as an impartation of faith in God from the Spirit. As I will demonstrate within this section, both Aquinas and Calvin held that every person's natural knowledge of God has been compromised, weakened, reduced, smothered, overlaid, or impeded by sin and its consequences are that the *sensus divinitatis*, prior to faith and regeneration, is both narrowed in scope and partially suppressed. It is only through the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit that it is repaired (Plantinga, 2000: 184). Without this reparation, humankind simply prefers their sin over God and will not respond to arguments, a fact admitted by Nietzsche who said, "It is our preference that decides against Christianity – not arguments" (Lubac, 1995: 49).

Finally, Paul's manner supplies love and care for the spiritual unbeliever who, being made in the image of God, has great intrinsic value. The witness of a Spirit-led believer who approaches and treats with respect the unbeliever personifies the love Christ showed those around Him and is an invaluable testimony in Postmodernism where the culture tends to first think with its feelings.

#### 6.4.1 The Value of Paul's Message

As stated above, one key value of Paul's message is that it supplies special propositional revelation necessary for salvation that natural reason cannot obtain on its own, which in conjunction with the Holy Spirit, produces faith in an unbeliever. The Apostle specifically speaks to the divine nature of his message in Galatians when he says, "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me *is not according to man*. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it *through a revelation of Jesus Christ*" (Gal. 1:11-12, emphasis added). The gospel, says Paul, was provided to him directly via propositional revelation and not through his own human reasoning abilities. Using divine revelation, God supplied Paul with a fuller knowledge of Himself and His plan for humankind that cannot be obtained through His general revelation of creation and rational thought. A noteworthy observation from Paul's encounter with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers on Mars Hill is that the message Paul brought was distinctive from their humanistic philosophy: "May we know what this *new teaching* is which you are proclaiming? For you are bringing some *strange things* to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean" (Acts 17:19-20, emphasis added). Aquinas speaks to this point when he says:

"It is necessary for man to receive by faith not only things which are above reason, but also those which can be known by reason . . . for the sake of certitude. For human reason is very deficient in things concerning God. A sign of this is that philosophers, in their inquiry into human affairs by natural investigation have fallen into many errors, and have disagreed among themselves, and consequently, in order that men might have knowledge of God, free of doubt and uncertainty, it was

necessary for divine truths to be delivered to them by way of faith, being told to them, as it were, by God Himself Who cannot lie" (Aquinas, 1999: 70).

It should be pointed out that Aquinas says the end result of propositional revelation is a knowledge of God that is void of reservation and ambiguity, which are things the postmodernist asserts a person cannot attain. Aquinas' statement dovetails quite well with 1 Thess. 1:5 where Paul says their gospel produced a state of complete certainty (πληροφορία) in his audience, with Paul even modifying the term with πολλῆ (full, complete) to increase the strength of his statement. There is no evidence that indicates such a thing would not be true today. Even in Postmodernism, Paul's message through the Holy Spirit is able to produce complete certainty with its listeners in regards to the truth claims it makes, and does not work against humankind's reason, but goes beyond it.

Jonathan Edwards agreed on this point and regarded humanity's natural reason as the highest faculty humans have, and maintained that even the heathen realized that the main business of humankind was the improvement and exercise of their understanding. But Edwards argued the purpose for which God had given humankind the faculty of understanding was that he/she might understand divine things. However, because of the Fall, divinity could not be learned simply by the improvement of humankind's reason but required God's propositional revelation in Scripture. Still, Edwards envisaged a key role for reason as humanity came to know about God and distinguished between a 'natural' and 'spiritual' type of divine knowledge, with the former being obtainable by the natural exercise of human's faculties. But Edwards realized also that there is a difference between having a right speculative notion of the doctrines contained in the word of God, and having a due sense of them in the heart. Edwards argued that we cannot enjoy a spiritual knowledge without first having a natural (or rational) knowledge of divine things – that "no object can come at the heart but through the door of the understanding: and there can be no spiritual knowledge of that of which there is not first a rational knowledge"

(Edwards, 1990: 12-17). Paul's message contained both: a rational aspect for the rational being and a spiritual dimension for the spiritual being of a person.

However, even though Paul's message contains information that addresses the spiritual side of humankind, Paul also makes clear that no natural person will be receptive to this spiritual message, because none seek God (cf. Rom. 3:11). In fact, they will be overtly hostile to it. Paul writes in Rom. 8:7: "because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so". The Apostle expounds on this in Colossians when he says unbelievers who have come to Christ were "formerly alienated and hostile in mind" (Col 1:21). The "alienation" is specifically one which is worked out "in the mind" or thinking of the unbeliever. The unbeliever cannot subject himself to the law's greatest command, which is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all of your soul and with all of your mind" (Matt. 22:36-37). Instead, non-Christians "despise the wisdom and instruction" of God, as Proverbs 1:7 says. Paul emphasizes that the unbeliever's intellectual enmity against God is simultaneously his epistemological undoing when the Apostle tells the Ephesians: "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart" (Eph. 4:17-18).

The unbeliever's antagonism against the Word of God is not narrowly a religious matter. Presuppositionalist proponent Greg Bahnsen argues that the unbeliever's enmity entails opposition to the very worldview which is the context and foundation of any particular Biblical message or applications. He asserts that only the Christian worldview makes language and rationality (logic) intelligible, and so unbelievers will be led, if they are consistent, to oppose language and rationality themselves in order to oppose the Christian worldview which alone sustains their intelligibility and possibility. The unbeliever's war with the "Word" (Christ and the Bible) will lead them to be at

war with the “word”: ultimately all human language and meaning. Because they reject the transcendent Word of God (Jesus) and the Bible (both being the very truth of God), they are led in the immanent domain to reject the idea of the word, meaning, truth, and logic as well (Bahnsen, 1987).

The Biblical evidence shows that the solution to this dilemma – that humankind needs to receive the message of God but is actually in rebellion against it – is found in the second part of the Apostle’s apologetic framework, which is the work of the Holy Spirit.

#### **6.4.2 The Value of Paul’s Method**

The Biblical data presented in Chapter Four (cf. 4.4) demonstrates that the monergistic work of the Holy Spirit that occurs in the life of the unbeliever is the primary component in Paul’s *apologia*. Without the Spirit, the message would be rejected and Paul’s manner would be at the very least mocked and at worst, exploited and taken advantage of. The Spirit’s work repairs the *sensus divinitatis* that is within all of humankind (cf. Tit. 3:5), with the reparation being accompanied by actions of the Spirit that affect the cognitive functions and affections.

Plantinga argues that the most important cognitive consequence of sin for the unbeliever is the failure to know God; that the most serious noetic effects of sin have to do with their knowledge of God. Were it not for sin and its effects, God’s presence and glory would be as obvious and uncontroversial to everyone as the presence of other minds, physical objects, and the past (Plantinga, 2000: 214, 217).

The first two components of Paul’s three witness apologetic framework is ratified by Plantinga as he describes what he believes to be the remedy for the dilemma that humankind finds itself in. God needed a way to inform human beings – via a metanarrative – of the scheme of salvation He has graciously

made available. God could have done this in many different ways but ultimately He chose to use a three-tiered cognitive process. First, God arranged for the production of Scripture, the Bible, which contains the gospel (Paul's message). Correlative with Paul's first component (the message), and necessary to its properly serving its purpose, is the second element of God's three-tiered cognitive process: the presence and action of the Holy Spirit promised by Christ Himself and celebrated in the epistles of the Apostle Paul. By virtue of the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of those to whom faith is given, the ravages of sin are repaired from a cognitive standpoint, gradually or suddenly, to a greater or lesser extent. Moreover, it is by virtue of the activity of the Holy Spirit that non-Christians come to grasp, believe, accept, endorse, and rejoice in the truth of the great things of the gospel (Plantinga, 2000: 243).

The principal work of the Holy Spirit is the production in the hearts of Christian believers of the third element of the reparation process, which is faith. Paul makes clear that faith is a gift (Eph. 2:8-9; 1 Cor. 12:9), which is something that initially comes from outside the unbeliever. This is something agreed to by John Calvin. Faith, says Calvin, is "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence [Note the same end result described by Paul in 1 Thess. 1:5 as "full conviction"] towards us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Calvin, 1585). Faith therefore involves an explicitly cognitive element; it is as Calvin says, knowledge – knowledge for the spiritual being that speaks of the availability of redemption and salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ – and it is revealed to the unbeliever's mind.

But then there is the work of the Holy Spirit that affects the unbeliever's affections. Faith also involves the will: it is "sealed upon our hearts." By virtue of this sealing, the unbeliever is changed from someone who can just understand the message of the gospel contained in Scripture (because of the text's perspicuity) to someone who not only knows about the scheme of salvation God has prepared but is also heartily grateful to the Lord for it and

loves Him because of what He has done. The account of Lydia in Acts 16 (cf. Chapter Three, 3.4.1) provides testimony to this fact. Sealing, therefore, involves the executive function of the will (Plantinga, 2000: 243-4). With both the cognitive and affection-based pieces of the *sensus divinitatis* repaired by the Holy Spirit, the unbeliever is able to receive Christ as their Lord and Savior and experience salvation.

Now as to this process, the question naturally arises as to how standard classical apologetic arguments come into play, especially in light of the fact that Paul (as documented in Chapter Four, section 4.3.1) never explicitly utilized classical theistic proofs for God or attempted to engage in debates over the validity of Scripture or other points of contention that oftentimes occur in modern apologetic encounters. Following Paul on this point is Schaeffer who stated in a lecture that “all the classic proofs were worthless” (Schaeffer, 1963) and never focused on the integrity/reliability of the New Testament documents (Follis, 2006: 421). No evidence suggests that Paul’s framework would explicitly rule out the use of such discussions, but what Schaeffer seems to be saying is that, most times, an unbeliever will come to faith in Christ by watching the Christian community live out the gospel message. In addition, they should also respond to the truth of the message itself that is delivered in the power of the Holy Spirit.

But what sort of phenomenology is involved in this epistemic process and how does it operate inside the unbeliever? Plantinga argues that most times beliefs constituting faith are typically taken as basic, meaning they are not accepted by way of argument from other propositions or on the evidential basis of other propositions. Such certainly could be accepted on the basis of other propositions, and perhaps in some cases this actually occurs. But it goes differently for many unbelievers: the non-Christian reads Scripture or something presenting a scriptural teaching, or hears the gospel preached, or is told of it by parents, or encounters a scriptural teaching as the conclusion of an argument or in some other way encounters a proclamation of the gospel. The

message strikes the unbeliever as something that simply seems correct; it seems compelling; the unbeliever finds themselves saying, "Yes, that's right, that's the truth of the matter; this is indeed the word of the Lord." (Plantinga, 2000: 250). Or, perhaps the conviction arises slowly, and only after long and hard study, thought, discussion, prayer. According to this model, which is patterned after both Aquinas and Calvin, the conviction comes by way of the activity of the Holy Spirit. Calvin speaks of the internal "testimony" and (more often) "witness" of the Holy Spirit; Aquinas, of the divine "instigation" and "invitation" (Plantinga, 2000: 251).

At first, modern apologists may reject such thinking as fideistic. However, even Aquinas has noted that natural theology is pretty difficult for most people, and that most have neither the leisure, ability, inclination, nor education to follow those theistic proofs (Aquinas, 1999: 103). Paul speaks to the fact that all human beings can come to God by the Spirit's command because what can be known about God is plain; complex theistic proofs may be utilized by the Spirit at times, but it is not normative. (Rom. 1 and Plantinga, 2000: 171). But here is where a delicate balance must be struck between the acceptance of the above true work of the Holy Spirit and the acknowledgement from those embracing such teaching on the solid foundation that undergirds the Christian message.

Plantinga may indeed be right when he says that, according to Calvin and Aquinas (and Paul and Schaeffer), an acceptance of the gospel message does not typically come to the spiritual postmodernist through detailed examinations of philosophical and physically evidential proofs for God, but rather the *sensus divinitatis* is repaired by the Holy Spirit via what Plantinga calls *occasions* of either being exposed to God's creation or exposure to the preaching of the gospel. The unbeliever, exposed to these things, has beliefs arise within him that are occasioned by the circumstances, but are not conclusions from them. Plantinga says that to think an unbeliever views a work of nature and cognitively concludes that God exists would be a ridiculously weak argument (Plantinga, 2000: 175). True belief in God is not had by argument or religious

experience, says Plantinga, but rather the notion of the reparation of the *sensus divinitatis* by the Spirit. Then (as in the case of sense perception) the experience the unbeliever has is the occasion for the formation of the beliefs in question, and this plays a causal role (a role governed by God's design plan) in their genesis (Plantinga, 2000: 258-9). To assist in his position, he quotes Jonathan Edwards with approval: "This evidence, that they, that are spiritually enlightened, have of the truth of the things of religion, is a kind of intuitive and immediate evidence. They believe the doctrines of God's word to be divine, because they see divinity in them" (Plantinga, 2000: 259).

However, while I agree with Plantinga on his conclusions regarding the Holy Spirit's work in humankind and how the Spirit's instigation may override the postmodernist challenges of relative truth/linguistics and pluralism, I contend that he goes too far and does not fully follow Paul's *apologia* in that he too greatly discounts the need to have an objective basis for the subjective experience of salvation. When using the analogies of sense perception and memory beliefs, he does not fully take into account that these things contain their knowledge only from objective reality and historical events that have occurred within their purview. They have been grounded in space-time history just as the gospel events were. Devoid of such an objective foundation, it becomes difficult for the Christian apologist to refute something such as the Mormon's "burning in the bosom" doctrine (which tells the Mormon how one knows a teaching is from God) or Richard Dawkin's argument for people who believe in flying spaghetti monsters. Moreover, such a basis provides teeth for carrying out the Scriptural mandate to test the spirits to ensure that what comes to the spiritual human being is actually from God (1 John 4:1).

Plantinga chides Locke and other evangelical thinkers who hold that warrant for Christian belief can only come by way of argument or evidence (Plantinga, 2000: 206), but I would respectfully submit that he confuses the two dimensions of history and faith, and overlooks the reliance the Apostle Paul's message had on historical events and the resurrection of Christ. I agree with Schaeffer who

said, "It is important to remember, first of all, that we cannot separate true apologetics from the work of the Holy Spirit, nor from a living relationship in prayer to the Lord on the part of the Christian. We must understand that eventually the battle is not just against flesh and blood" (Schaeffer, 1990A: 153). Certainly he and Plantinga would be in agreement about the Spirit's work. But God has ordained His plan of salvation be carried out with the preaching of a message, grounded in space-time events, through which faith is given, as Paul says: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

Leaving aside my disagreement with Plantinga about the need for an objective basis to faith, I concur with his affirmation of the Holy Spirit's monergistic work in the mind and heart of the unbeliever, which overcomes the postmodernist challenges of truth, language, and pluralism. The unbeliever, after the Spirit's work has been accomplished, will support the truth of the gospel, the text contained within Scripture, and the exclusivistic claims of Christ. They will then stand experience what Paul spoke of in 1 Thess. 1:5 (certainty in their faith) and uphold the Belgic Confession's Article Five, which says: "*And we believe without a doubt all things contained in them – not so much because the church receives them and approves them as such, but above all because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they prove themselves to be from God*" (emphasis added) as well as Q. 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism: "*True faith is not only a knowledge and conviction that everything God reveals in his word is true; it is also a deep-rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel, that, out of the sheer grace earned for us by Christ, not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God, and have been granted salvation*" (emphasis added).

Such assurance and conviction occur with the unbeliever because, being a spiritual being made in the image of God and whose *sensus divinitatis* has been effaced but not erased by sin, they possess a teaching within them that needs to

be awakened by God's Spirit and receive the Spirit's gift of faith, as Calvin says: "From this we conclude that it is not a doctrine that must first be learned in school, but one of which each of us is master from his mother's womb and which nature itself permits no one to forget, although many strive with every nerve to this end" (Calvin, 1585). In other words, the spiritual dimension of humankind is fulfilled with the Spirit's work just as the rational dimension of humankind is satisfied with the objective foundation of the gospel that is also supplied through Paul's *apologia*. Scholars suggest that one without the other is simply insufficient to bring about saving faith in Christ. As Plantinga suggests, perhaps in believing humanity, the *sensus divinitatis* is a disposition to believe in God (to love Him, trust Him, see His beauty and glory and loveliness), but in unbelieving humanity, only a tendency to believe that there is such a person, just as (according to the book of James) the devils do (Plantinga, 2000: 172).

Again, this is why both the rational and spiritual sides of the person need to be met. The demons shudder, according to James, because they believe these things but hate them and they also reject God, just as an unbeliever does. The difference between a believer and the devil, therefore, lies in the area of affections: the function of loving and hating, finding attractive or repellent, approving or disapproving. And the believer, the person whose *sensus divinitatis* has been repaired by the Spirit, has the right beliefs, but also the right affections. It is the Holy Spirit who is responsible for this renewal and redirection of affections (Plantinga, 2000: 292). Or as Jonathan Edwards wrote, true religion, in great part, consists in holy affections (Edwards, 2007:20). Having such affections are important because, as Pascal has noted in his work *Pensées*: "People almost invariably arrive at their beliefs not on the basis of proof but on the basis of what they find attractive" (Pascal, 2003). In the case of the unbeliever and the Holy Spirit, the Spirit just happens to make the right thing the attractive thing.

Before moving on to the value Paul's manner brings to the spiritual person, one last item to address is the topic of miracles: are they something to be utilized by

today's apologist? As was discussed in Chapter Four (cf. 4.4.2.1; 4.4.2.2), the book of Acts seems to show the apologetic value of Pauline miracles (Acts 13:10; 14:3; 14:10; 15:12; 16:26; 19:11; 28:3-5; and 28:8-9), yet Paul's epistles seemed to downplay their impact. The debate between the active use of the miraculous today versus cessationism is beyond the scope of this work. However, there are a number of important distinctions that can be briefly covered with regard to the use of miracles by a modern apologist. First is the distinction between the *fact* of miracles and the *gift* of miracles. Even a cursory reading of Scripture will show that the miraculous runs throughout the entire Bible. However, the gift of miracles appears confined to the Mosaic, Prophetic (primarily Elijah and Elisha), and the Apostolic historical periods, with a future period yet to come, that being the Apocalyptic period. During the three periods during which the gift of miracles was active, the Biblical evidence suggests that their purpose was for God to dramatically demonstrate His revelatory truth claims over the false gods and teachings of those eras. Because the Apostles and Prophets have since laid the foundation for the Church (Eph. 2:20), their work is finished and the miraculous apostolic sign gifts have now ceased being normative (Wiersbe, 1996).

The second distinction to be made concerns the difference between what is *descriptive* and *prescriptive* in Scripture. The book of Acts contains much descriptive material on the Church's birth as do the epistles of Paul. While Paul certainly describes the gift of miracles in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, he also mentions in chapter 13 that certain gifts will cease (1 Cor. 13:8). There is some evidence that this process may have already been underway even during the time of Paul's ministry as he who had healed others left Trophimus sick in Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20) and was relieved when Epaphroditus recovered from the illness that had him close to death (Phil. 2:24-25).

In conclusion, the evidence suggests that the gift of performing such miracles is not normative within His body, the Church, and should not be expected to be a part of the modern day apologist's framework.

### 6.4.3 The Value of Paul's Manner

When Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians, he said that he and his missionary counterparts lived out the gospel and demonstrated its truth partly by “what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake” (1 Thess. 1:5). Given that the research presented in Chapter Five showed how postmodernists charge the Church with not mirroring the teachings of Jesus, it would be reasonable to conclude that the care and affection Paul demonstrated to the Thessalonians should be shown by today's apologists as well. It would seem especially appropriate for the postmodernist who has witnessed the death of Modernism's promise of humankind getting better. Instead, postmodernists have experienced the effects of Nietzsche's death-of-God children like Pol Pot whose taunting slogan was “To keep you is no benefit. To destroy you is no loss” (Thomas, 2007: 46). In stark contrast to atheistic thought and even other religions (e.g. Hinduism) stands the teachings of Christ with Schaeffer arguing that, “Only Christianity, of all the world's religions, has produced a real interest in man” (Schaeffer, 1990A: 44).

What Schaeffer is alluding to is the fact that God created man in His own image (Gen. 1:26) so that man has intellect and will, but also (as stated in the previous section) affections that form aims and intentions in all people. The fall into sin has had cataclysmic consequences, both affective and cognitive, so that humanity loves itself over God and over others. In the same way humankind treats God with contempt, so he/she does to those who have been made in the image of God.

But when the *sensus divinitatis* is repaired by the Spirit, then the third component of three witness apologetics becomes active and begins showcasing the love and respect for those made in the image of God that the Creator intended. Colin Smith sees this witness reflected in the role Paul describes in 2 Cor. 5:20 of being an ambassador for Christ. To counter objections such as those

raised in the Kinnaman study presented in Chapter Five (cf. section 5.5) , Smith says the solution is to model the role of Christ's ambassador to the world through loyalty, integrity, humility, love, and true spirituality (Smith, 2000: 177-179). Smith argues that it is not so much great gifts that God uses as it is great likeness to Jesus and that a Postmodern world will not hear the apologist's words until its attention has been engaged by the quality of the apologist's life (Smith, 2000: 179).

#### **6.4.4 Summary**

The evidence presented in this section suggests that Paul's apologetic framework meets a number of needs that the spiritual postmodernist has, while at the same time overcoming some of the key challenges with which Postmodernism confronts Christianity. First, Paul's message supplies special propositional revelation necessary for salvation that the unbeliever cannot obtain on his/her own, which in conjunction with the Holy Spirit, produces faith in the person. Agreeing with this is Schaeffer who wrote, "No one stresses more than I that people have no final answers in regard to truth, morals or epistemology without God's revelation in the Bible" (Schaeffer, 1990A: 184).

Next, Paul's method is centered upon the monergistic work of the Holy Spirit that alters both the cognitive and affective functions of the unbelieving person so they will embrace, rather than reject, the gospel message.

Finally, Paul's manner addresses the value each person, being a spiritual being, knows they possess although they have forgotten the source of that value (the image of God). The postmodernist wants to see the gospel lived out in the lives of those carrying the message, and the Spirit enables the apologist to do just that, with St. Paul providing the evidence (cf. 4.5).

Within Paul's three witness apologetics is found both the monergistic work of the Spirit as well as a synergistic partnership with the apologist to reach the spiritual dimension of humanity. Robert Coleman recognizes both when he

comments that it is not difficult to understand why Jesus told his disciples to tarry until they were empowered by the Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). He asks how else could they ever make disciples who develop in His likeness because, in their own wisdom and strength, they were helpless. Only as Christ was with them, filling them with his presence, could they do his work (Coleman, 2000: 268). There is no Biblical evidence that suggests that it is different today.

Let us now turn our attention to how Paul's framework may be used in dealing with the unbeliever as a moral being.

## **6.5 APPEALING TO THE POSTMODERNIST AS A MORAL BEING**

David Dockery asserts that two hallmarks characterizing Postmodernism are a disbelief in objective truth and a deep sense that morality is relative (Dockery, 2001: 12). Today, conscience does not so much direct behavior, says Dockery, but instead now licenses behavior by establishing the thought that one should not feel bad about sin; it has become the writer of permission slips with the end result being a culture that has lost its sense of shame (Dockery, 2001: 14).

With truth being relative in the area of morals, ethics simply becomes emotive. With pluralism the norm, spirituality and its accompanying moral framework is allowed to be based on preference rather than on reality and fact. Add to this the insight Paul brings regarding people's consciences being callous (Eph. 4:19) and seared as with a branding iron (1 Tim. 4:2).

How can Paul's apologetic framework directly address the needs of the postmodernist's moral being and the situation they are in? Based on information uncovered in the Pauline speeches and epistles (cf. Chapter Four), I find at least three ways Paul's apologia can benefit today's unbeliever. First, Paul's message supplies the communication regarding the truth of sin, guilt before God, the need to repent, and an answer to the current state humankind

finds itself in. Paul's speeches in Acts as well as the Pauline corpus contain many statements regarding the sin of humanity before God and its need to turn from darkness to light, which was a statement directly made by Jesus to Paul on the Damascus road (Acts 26:18). Such a message is needed today because, as Michael Andrus asserts, today's postmodernist suffers beneath a sense of meaninglessness rather than guilt. They are guilty, he says, but they do not realize they need salvation from anything (Andrus, 2000: 161).

Second, Paul's reliance on the Holy Spirit brings two critical items to the postmodernist's moral being: (1) the conviction of sin as promised by Jesus in John 16:8; (2) the ability to overcome sin via a walk by the Spirit as stated by Paul in Gal. 5:16. This second point is one that cannot be overemphasized. The modern day apologist should remember that the ultimate goal of apologetics is not simply the victory in a debate or the transfer of knowledge, but the moral conversion of the unbeliever to Christ. As A. W. Tozer has written:

“No man is better for knowing that God in the beginning created the heaven and the earth. The devil knows that, and so did Ahab and Judas Iscariot. No man is better for knowing that God so loved the world of men that He gave His only begotten Son to die for their redemption. In hell there are millions who know that. Theological truth is useless until it is obeyed. The purpose behind all doctrine is to secure moral action” (Tozer, 1980B: 141).

Lastly, Paul's manner overcomes Postmodernism's claims of hypocrisy as documented in Kinnaman's research (cf. Chapter Five, 5.5.2), which argues that the morality of Christians simply does not match the message proclaimed by Christ in the Gospels or by Paul. But in addition to neutralizing such a charge, Paul's manner, when lived out in a loving community, enables the Church to become one of the few institutions that is truly prepared for the postmodernist world since it is global, multicultural, and multigenerational in nature (Dockery, 2001: 16). Evidence supporting the above claims is found in the Christian fellowship itself.

These last points are especially critical for the postmodernist who looks for moral existential proof and relevance in the lives of professing believers (cf. 5.5.2). The unbeliever, although not a Christian, appears to still nod in agreement with Augustine who said, “Moral character is assessed not by what a man knows but by what he loves” (Chadwick, 2001: 54).

As will be demonstrated in subsequent sections, the moral character reflected in the Christian life positively serves the apologist in at least two ways. First, it witnesses for Christ by individually helping and comforting those who are hurting. Noting this, Michael Green writes “Not many people are brought to Christ via the route of the intellect, though some are. Vital though the intellect is, most people are won when they sense Christ coming to touch broken places and torn feelings in their lives” (Green, 1992: 224).

Such a stance was key for Schaeffer, but it should be noted that compassion and caring was not something merely used as an apologetic tool, but rather a logical outworking that permeated his apologetics – something evidenced in his mission statement for his L’Abri as recorded by his wife Edith: “to show forth by demonstration in our life and work, the existence of God” (Schaeffer, 1992: 15-16). For Francis Schaeffer, neither his ministry nor the work of L’Abri could be explained without reference to the concept of a caring community (Follis, 2006: 128). “There is nothing more ugly than a Christian orthodoxy without understanding or without compassion”, said Schaeffer (Schaeffer, 1990A: 34).

Second, the moral character in the Christian’s life provides personal credibility for the apologist who is being watched closely by their postmodernist audience to see if they actually live out the message they present. Ravi Zacharias relays the story of delivering an intellectual defense for God in a public setting where acquaintances of his had brought a medical doctor who was an unbeliever. After the lecture, while driving home, Zacharias’ colleagues asked her what she thought of his message. Her response was: “Very persuasive. I wonder what he is like in his private life?” (Zacharias, 2000: 42).

### 6.6.1 The Value of Paul's Message

In an interview with author Lee Strobel, Christian philosopher Paul Copan (making reference to a statement made by G. K. Chesterton) remarks that of all the doctrines of Christianity, the doctrine of original sin has the strongest claim to “empirical verifiability” for today’s postmodernist (Strobel, 2007: 253). This teaching found throughout Scripture, including the writings and gospel message of Paul, offers two important truths to the moral side of the postmodernist.

First, Paul’s message brings an answer to the postmodernist who is looking for answers as to why the promise of Modernism failed; why humankind is not evolving to be a more morally upright and loving race, but instead why Nietzsche’s prediction of the twentieth century being the bloodiest in history came true (Copleston, 1963: 405-406). The story of the Fall described in the third chapter of Genesis provides concrete answers that humankind did not start out in the present condition that it finds itself, something Francis Schaeffer calls “man’s dilemma”. If humankind, whether somehow created by a curious thing called God or kicked up out of the slime by chance, has always been in this dilemma, the dilemma is part of what being ‘human’ is. And if this is what humanity intrinsically is, and it has always been like this, then Schaeffer says the French art historian and poet Baudelaire is right when he says, “If there is a God, He is the devil.” This statement was simply the logical deduction from the premise that humankind, with all its cruelty and suffering, is now as it always has been (Schaeffer, 1990A: 110).

Moreover, such reasoning actually then leads to hopelessness in the unbeliever because, as Schaeffer notes, if we say that humankind in its present cruelty is what humankind has always been, and what humankind intrinsically is, how can there be any hope of a qualitative moral change in humankind? There might be a quantitative change – that is, people may become just a little less cruel – but there can never be a qualitative change (Schaeffer, 1990C: 273).

Paul's message brings not only the true account of how humankind began from a moral standpoint, but how humankind was altered in the Fall (cf. Rom. 5:12-14), why humankind is the immoral agent it now is (something Copan and Chesterton assert is empirically verifiable; cf. Rom. 5:12), and perhaps most importantly, how humankind's current dilemma can be overcome (cf. Rom. 5:15).

However, it must be understood that Paul's message of personal sin and accountability before God will not always (dare I say, seldom?) be welcomed because, as Paul spells out well in Romans 3, humankind is in rebellion against God and against God's truth claims. This fact, naturally, is not acknowledged initially by the unbeliever. While the modernist imagines themselves a perfectly fit arbiter and neutral judge of any gospel claim put forward, it is a truism for Postmodernism that we know or judge nothing neutrally and this can be used to the apologist's benefit. One agreement I have with presuppositional apologetics is that the unbeliever opposes the Christian faith with a whole antithetical system of thought, not simply with piecemeal criticisms. Their attacks are aimed not at random points of Christian teaching but at the very foundations of Christian thinking (such as the Fall). The particular criticisms which are utilized by unbelievers rest upon their basic, key assumptions which unify and inform all of their thinking. And it is this presuppositional root which the apologist must aim to eradicate if his defense of the faith is to be truly effective. Jon Hinkson and Greg Ganssle write that they often say to students, "Let me tell you why, if the Biblical story is true, you will hear it threateningly, and why you ought to apply a hermeneutic of suspicion to that very reaction" (Hinkson and Ganssle, 2000: 87). It should be expected that the moral element and implications of Paul's full message will be eschewed by the unbeliever, as A. W. Tozer makes clear: "Bible exposition without moral application raises no opposition. It is only when the hearer is made to understand that truth is in conflict with his heart that resistance sets in" (Tozer, 1980B: 141).

Schaeffer notes this reaction in the unbeliever is normal and should be anticipated. He argues that Christianity is the easiest religion and message in the world, because it is the only religion in which God the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit do everything. But it is also the hardest religion and message in the world for the same reason. The heart of the rebellion of Satan and humankind was the desire to be autonomous (cf. Is. 14; Ezek. 28; Gen. 3), and accepting the Christian faith robs the unbeliever not of their existence or worth (it actually offers real worth), but it robs them completely of being autonomous; it is a complete denial of being autonomous. That, says Schaeffer, is the reason why people do not accept the sufficient answers of Paul's message and why they are counted by God as disobedient and guilty when they do not bow to its truth (Schaeffer, 1990A: 183). The unbeliever must bow first to what their reason tells them (that God exists), then bow to what their spirit says (they need salvation), and lastly bow in the realm of morals – that is, to acknowledge that they have sinned and therefore have true guilt before the God who is there (Schaeffer, 1990A: 146).

This being the case, what can be done to bring about the recognition of God's truth claims to the postmodernist regarding their true moral state before their Creator? This is answered by Paul's second component in his three witness apologetic framework, the Holy Spirit.

### **6.6.2 The Value of Paul's Method**

As previously mentioned, Paul's reliance on the Holy Spirit overcame the intellectual and affection-based rebellion in his audience by bringing about the conviction of sin that Christ promised, according to John 16:8. The Biblical evidence (cf. Rom. 1 and 3) shows that the problem with the unbeliever is not a lack of proof or knowledge but rather a moral deficiency: humankind simply refuses to submit to the evidence that God has provided. Follis cites both Calvin and Paul as stating that people see enough to keep them from making excuses, but natural humankind's blindness prevents people from reaching beyond their

moral dilemma, and it is only by the gift of faith delivered via the Spirit and His light that humankind can gain real knowledge about the truth of its condition from God (Follis, 2006: 21).

Once the conviction about their true dilemma has been delivered by the Spirit, the Biblical evidence shows that the empowering of the Spirit then comes, which provides the actual ability to walk in the moral manner of life that God intended (cf. Eph. 2). The miracle of the new birth is not that former unbelievers do different things, but rather that they *want* to do different things; their affections have been changed by the Spirit. They witness existential proof of the Spirit in their lives by personally experiencing what Puritan Thomas Chalmers spoke about in his sermon “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection” (cf. Chalmers): the *do* of humankind now matches the *ought* of God. Of course, this does not mean the new believer is completely free from the power of sin as Paul makes clear in Romans 7, but it does mean they have now been enlightened and enabled to live in a moral manner that is in line with God’s moral standards (Gal. 5:16; Rom. 6:14).

This work of the Spirit upon the moral side of humanity – the enlightenment of its true condition upon its heart and mind, conviction of sin, and the moral transformation power that is provided to it – now leads to how the third component in Paul’s apologetic framework becomes a witness to unbelievers.

### **6.6.3 The Value of Paul’s Manner**

David Dockery asserts that in order for new postmodern generations to consider the plausibility of Christianity, they must be convinced of its authenticity and its community-building characteristics before they will hear its truth claims (Dockery, 2001: 16). Such thinking dovetails perfectly with Schaeffer who argued that for evangelicalism to be a thing of strength and beauty, there must be an individual and corporate exhibition that God exists in our century in order to show that historic Christianity is more than just a

superior dialectic or a better point of psychological integration (Schaeffer, 1990A: 189).

As has been previously discussed in prior chapters, Paul lived among those he preached the gospel to and exhibited a witness among them that proved his conversion to Christ (cf. 1 Thess. 1:5). Paul's manner, then, becomes the final apologetic piece. Along with the rational, logical, spiritual defense and presentation of the gospel comes a love that the world sees in the individual Christian and in Christendom's corporate relationships (Schaeffer, 1990A: 165).

Colin Smith states that Robert McCheyne was right in his conviction that his people's greatest need was his personal holiness (Smith, 2000: 179). It is not so much great gifts that God uses as it is great likeness to Jesus that draws unbelievers. The data provided in Chapter Five (cf. 5.5.2) gives credence to the claim that a postmodernist world will not hear the apologist's words until its attention has been engaged by the moral quality of Christians' lives. This truth exhibits the power and importance that the Apostle Paul's manner has in his overall apologetic framework (cf. Chapter Four, 4.5), both in the individual apologist and the overall Christian community.

This aspect of community is a characteristic from the culture of Paul's day, which it shares with Postmodernism: people find part or much of their identity bound up in the community they belong to (cf. Chapter Two, 2.2.1). Susan Hecht states that, from a postmodernist perspective, the idea of relationships and morals in the context of community is very important. She argues that the postmodernist says that it is groups and communities where values/morals are formed and that increasingly, people do not give themselves an identity: they do not know who they are except by the group they belong to. All truth, identity, and morality are socially constructed, not individually constructed (Hecht, 2000: 247).

Hecht claims that the three key dynamics of relating to postmodernist unbelievers, in regard to evangelizing the apathetic to moderately interested unbelievers are: (1) creating an environment for spiritual progress; (2) engaging in persuasive interaction; (3) persuading people from the base of a morally pure and authentic walk with Christ (Hecht, 2000: 246). Reading through the first two chapters of 1 Thessalonians, one will find Paul engaged in all three (1 Thess. 1:5, 2:7, 2:10-11).

These three characteristics combine to create a participatory environment that serves two purposes. First, it engages the postmodernist in the work of the community. Second, it increases the reach of the witnessing Christian community to other unbelievers as more believers are won to Christ and engaged in the community's work. Hecht agrees with this model and asserts that most postmodernists prefer learning by participation rather than listening to someone give a lecture; that Postmodernism encourages a participatory epistemology or a learning-by-doing approach. The postmodernist wants to engage not only their minds but also their feelings and, being highly pragmatic, they are used to making choices based on how well an option meets a felt need (Hecht, 2000: 248-249).

The model that appeals to the moral being in people, which Hecht (2000) and others (cf. Robert Coleman, 2000) involved in evangelizing young postmodernists recommend is one patterned after the Apostle Paul's manner as described in 1 Thess. 1-2. First there is an incarnation of Christ in the person's life; the person becomes a servant and shows love to people who hurt. Next comes selection and association: the leading of the Holy Spirit brings the evangelist to the unbelievers who become disciples by an association as Paul outlines in 1 Thess. 1-2; a family-like relationship is developed. Within this family relationship, commitment is formed as the new believers are taught to follow what the Spirit testifies in their heart is true by seeing the truth lived out in the lives of other believers as Paul modeled and encouraged. Though postmodernists reject claims of theological certainty, they are not blind to

sacrificial love when they can see it. This demonstration of love leads to association as the new disciples get involved in ministry; everyone finds his or her own place and experiences fulfillment in serving the body. During this time, supervision and accountability occurs so as to keep the new believers engaged and growing. Finally, the stage of reproduction and impartation is achieved – when the new believers take the lead, are left in the Spirit’s hands, and begin to carry out Christ’s great commission (Coleman, 2000: 256-267).

#### **6.6.4 Summary**

The holistic nature of Paul’s apologetic framework makes it possible for the postmodernist to "know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19) when the *apologia* is addressed to the moral being of the unbeliever. Give the data presented in prior sections, a good case can be made for Paul’s message being the communication vehicle for the truth of sin, guilt before God, the need to repent, and a supplier for the answer as to the current moral state humankind finds itself in.

Next, because Paul’s message will not be received favorably by humankind, Paul’s method included a full reliance on the Holy Spirit Who addresses the moral aspect of humankind by bringing about the conviction of sin as promised by Jesus in John 16:8, as well as supplying the empowerment to overcome sin via a walk by the Spirit as stated by Paul in Gal. 5:16. Finally, Paul’s manner overcomes the claims of moral hypocrisy (schisms, internal fighting, moral failures, and other like items) aimed at Christianity by Postmodernism that were documented in Chapter Five. Agreeing with Schaeffer on the power and witness of love, Carnell (who espoused a rational form of presuppositional apologetics, somewhat like Schaeffer’s) says: “I believe that if Christian apologists would rally their wits and make better use of love as a point of contact, great things might be accomplished for the defense of the faith” (Carnell, 1960: 10).

Given that data shows the major complaint of Postmodernism today is the mismatch between the Christian message and the messenger (cf. 5.5.2), the apologetic in this age seems to be the moral reality of Christ in the life of the believer and a life that is attractive to the world. The Church must grow as a community of the Word: a community that interprets and proclaims the Word faithfully and carries out the Word authentically. In the end, Madeline L'Engle summarizes this thought well when she writes, "Rather than arguing about the superiority of Christianity over world religions, I would rather put forth a light that is so lovely that all would be drawn into his presence (Monroe, 2000: 295).

## 6.6 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter has been to propose an application of the Pauline apologetic framework for evangelism and a defense of the Christian faith in response to the key challenges discussed in Chapter Five. The data in this chapter as well as Chapter Four demonstrates that, contrary to relative truth, linguistic relativism, and philosophical pluralism, Paul held to absolute truth, linguistic certainty, and exclusivity where matters of faith and salvation are concerned. These concepts, then, are not so much "Modernistic" as they are Biblical.

The recommended proposal of Paul's framework has been one that utilizes a baseline of topic discussion points (truth, antithesis, God, Bible, Jesus, love) with Biblical and philosophical evidence showing that there are dimensions to each one that unbelievers will and will not be able to comprehend without the help from the Holy Spirit. Further, just as Paul noted how evangelists should have wisdom in understanding exactly how they should speak to each individual (Col. 4:6), today's apologist must spend time with each unbeliever to determine at what point in the framework's topical points they must begin to lead the person to Christ. This speaks to the statement introduced earlier in the chapter that there is not one, predefined apologetic approach which meets the needs of all people - something agreed to by both Carnell and Schaeffer. As an

example, if the apologist were with Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail and the Philippian jailer said to them 'Sir, what must I do to be saved?' for the apologist to start talking about epistemology and objective truth would be ridiculous. The apologist should instead say what Paul said: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved,' because the jailer was, on the basis of previous knowledge and events, ready for that answer (Schaeffer, 1990A: 176).

I have attempted to show how Paul's *tria martus* or three witness apologetics speaks to the postmodernist as a rational, spiritual, and moral being to bring them to saving faith in Christ. As Aquinas states, two things are requisite for faith: first, that the things which are of faith should be proposed to humankind; this is necessary in order that humankind believe something explicitly. The second thing requisite for faith is the assent of the believer to the things which are proposed to him/her. Accordingly, as regards the first of these, the faith that saves must come from God. For the things which are of faith surpass human reason, and hence they do not come to humankind's knowledge, unless God reveals them (Aquinas, 1999: 108). These arguments spell out the need for Paul's message and his method and the interworkings between the apologist and the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit should never be minimized, but nowhere in the Scriptures is found the work of the Holy Spirit an excuse for laziness and/or lack of love on the part of those with Christian responsibility (Schaeffer, 1990A: 191). Instead, what is found are the offices of teaching as documented by Paul in Titus 1:9. The evangelist should be capable of exhorting people (this refers to preaching) in sound teaching (this refers to lecturing) and of defeating those who contradict (this refers to disputing), which are all offices used by early Church teachers (Aquinas, 1999: xii). But like their Master, Christian apologists need to be mighty in word *and* deed (cf. Luke 24:19), which equates to living out the faith in a manner that overcomes Postmodernism's charge that message and the messenger are not synchronized.

In a real sense, Biblical data shows that two things must happen in the mind of the prodigal unbelieving son before he will get up and begin the long journey

home to his father. First, the prodigal must “come to his senses” (cf. Luke 15:17), which is accomplished in the Pauline apologetic framework through the message and the method of the Apostle. Second, he must believe that if he returns, there will be a welcome with love and the promise of a joyous relationship. The knowledge of sin without the anticipation of mercy and love will only cause a person to keep on running from God. The prodigal needs the knowledge of his misery to give him the desire to return, but he also needs the assurance of a welcome and real love to give him the confidence *to return* (Smith, 2000: 119).

It should be noted that although the thrust of this chapter has been an attempt to demonstrate how the Pauline apologetic framework may overcome some key challenges of Postmodernism, it is worthwhile to note there is much that the Christian worldview and Postmodernism share in common. These include a proper skepticism toward the cherished secular metanarratives of progress, moral perfectibility, technological advance, and economic determinism. But Christians must be aware that the postmodernist incredulity toward metanarratives extends to the Christian gospel’s truth claim as well. On the altar of pluralism will be sacrificed the exclusive claims of Christianity, as well as the hegemonistic pretensions of modernity and while the latter will not be missed, the former should not be allowed to occur (Mohler, 2001: 70).

Ravi Zacharias argues that the religious mission field has been cleared by Postmodernism – there is no final authority in the postmodernist’s mind that can be appealed to. However, there is just enough of a proper mindset left to allow reason a point of entry. As noted also, there is a tremendous search for a thriving, relational community, one which the Church of Jesus Christ is uniquely positioned to offer (Zacharias, 2000: 27-29). Therefore, it would seem that a great opportunity awaits the Christian evangelist/apologist who wishes to catapult the Apostle Paul’s apologetic framework into the current age and makes use of it.

Wisdom, of course, is required in applying the Pauline framework in Postmodernism. James Emory White recommends an evangelistic method for today that seems to closely mirror the Apostle's *apologia*. The approach should be culturally relevant, with a distinction being made between a transformation of the gospel and a translation of the gospel into the postmodern cultural context. Relationships must also be built with nonbelievers. Postmodernists will be reached as believers intentionally build relationships with them and share a credible verbal and personal witness, with this perhaps being the most effective and impactful form of evangelism. Evangelism should be understood as process and event, with a renewed emphasis on process and the maintenance of a Biblically functioning community.

In regard to apologetics, it must be used but the apologist must be ready to begin with the idea of truth itself. Christianity should also be portrayed as practical, but rather than declare that the gospel is true because it works, the apologist should maintain that it works because it is true. Lastly, a vision of the Church's mission must be recaptured inside the heart of each evangelist and defender of the faith. The early church was called to a fourfold purpose - worship, ministry, discipleship, and evangelism - and this mission should be individually embraced by each apologist who wishes to make disciples of Christ (White, 2001: 176-180).

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

### 7.1 THE PERSON AND BACKGROUND OF PAUL

After an introductory chapter, this process began with a look at the person and milieu of Paul. The purpose of the examination of Paul and his first century society was to gain insight into the culture of Paul's era, with special attention being paid to the religious and primary philosophical climate of his day. In addition, an attempt was made to understand the background, education, and conversion of Paul with the goal being to uncover information that would help in isolating the Apostle's apologetic framework.

Key attributes identified in Paul's culture were a growing cosmopolitanism, a broadening of individual freedom, a renewed interest in spiritual and religious matters, and a confused spiritual climate whose main element included the strong syncretistic tendencies of the various cults and religions of that era. As was demonstrated in Chapters Five and Six, all of these characteristics can be found in today's postmodernist society. As is the case today, Paul's exclusivistic message would compete with a number of both religious and philosophic movements, the primary religious challengers in the Apostle's time being the mystery religions/cults and Hellenistic Judaism. The key opponent in the area of philosophy would likely have been Stoicism. Like today, both the religious and philosophical opponents attempted to supply the people of the first century a σωτήριος so they could find a release from the weight of finitude, and the mire of everyday human life.

Into this environment came Saul of Tarsus, a composition of Jew, Roman, and Pharisee. His formal secular and religious education make it safe to say that Paul was not an average wordsmith, and certainly no unskilled preacher, despite his talk to the Corinthians about preaching nothing but Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). Paul lived in a rhetorically saturated oral culture, and while evidence was presented that he used his learning of rhetoric in numerous

ways when presenting the gospel, he did so without compromising the integrity of his message via fanciful oral practice.

This observation naturally begs the question as to what Paul's approach actually was when it came to presenting and defending Christianity in the midst of his philosophically pluralistic culture. Therefore, the next step taken in this study was to make an attempt at discovering Paul's apologetic framework.

## 7.2 THREE WITNESS APOLOGETICS

To uncover Paul's *apologia*, information from the book of Acts and the Pauline corpus was examined using the "One Paul" approach. The conclusion was that the Pauline apologetic is succinctly described in 1 Thess. 1:5, with the framework consisting of three components: a message that Paul carried, a method that the Apostle employed that included the convicting and convincing work of the Holy Spirit, and a manner with which Paul presented himself to both nonbelievers and believers alike. This apologetic structure was labeled as *tria martus* or "three witness apologetics" – a holistic methodology shown to differ from all other apologetic approaches in use today (cf. Chapter Four, 4.6.1).

The first part of Paul's framework was his *message*. This message, according to the evidence found in the book of Acts and the Pauline corpus, is not explicitly comprised of classical proofs for the existence of God or philosophically styled arguments that make the case for Hebraic monotheism. Instead, his message was basic and not complicated or difficult to ascertain, and was grounded in both space/time history and the Scriptures. It unabashedly proclaimed the existence of God, the dilemma of humankind's separation from God, the need to repent, and the work of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Lastly, the Apostle's message eschewed fideism and instead utilized historically evidentiary arguments, with the resurrection of Christ being the primary historical event

Paul employed in his effort to move his audience from faith in the 'seen' to faith in the unseen.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the second component of Paul's apologetic framework was labeled his *method*, which relied on the power of the Holy Spirit to work monergistically within the Apostle's audience to overcome the effects of sin and open their heart to receive the things being spoken of by Paul. In addition, there was a synergistic cooperation with the Spirit and Paul in that the Spirit guided, worked through the declaration of the gospel message, provided empowerment to perform miracles, and utilized the various rhetorical techniques employed by Paul to convince his audience of the truths that were being proclaimed. Arguments were made that Paul believed it was the Holy Spirit alone who could take an unbeliever from the historical evidences that could be verified via human reason, to the unseen spiritual truths that transcended human reason. Only the Spirit could open unbelievers' hearts so that they had the will to believe and were given a new/right affection for God. The Spirit revealed the truth to their minds, sealed it upon their hearts, and in the end testified to the fact that they were indeed God's children (Rom. 8:16) resulting in a firm epistemic and willful conviction of the gospel's truth.

The last part of Paul's framework, his *manner*, incorporated a number of different dimensions. These included the Apostle's outspoken testimony of his own changed life, including a willingness to forsake all and become a bond-servant of Christ, his actions and teaching concerning persecution and adversity that would come through preaching the Gospel, the example he set for both unbelievers and believers, and the love he demonstrated to the same. Paul's manner included an exemplary life that spoke to both non-Christians and Christians alike. To nonbelievers, Paul exemplified God's grace. If God could extend love to someone like Saul the Pharisee, then no one need fear that their sin could keep them from the salvation message Paul proclaimed. To believers, Paul mirrored his Master and urged others to follow the living example he set before them so that the authenticity of the message the community of Christians

delivered would be validated by what the culture saw in their lives. Lastly, arguments were made that the love the Apostle exhibited for those inside and outside of the Church is readily apparent in both the book of Acts and the epistles that are attributed to him.

These three components (Paul's message, method, and manner) were argued in this study to be the framework of the Apostle's *apologia*. The next area of examination in this study was a look at some of the challenges posed to modern day Christianity by Postmodernism.

### **7.3 THE REALITY OF POSTMODERNISM'S CHALLENGE**

In July 2009, social science researchers at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor released a study arguing that Postmodernism, rather than science, is the greatest antagonist of religiosity. Their conclusion was drawn from data that showed those majoring in Humanities or Social Sciences were found to experience a significant negative effect on their religious attendance and self-assessed importance of religion in one's life. "Because we consider both the Humanities and many of the Social Sciences particularly strongly imbued with Postmodernism, we take this as evidence for a negative effect of Postmodernism on religiosity," they state in the report (Barrick, 2009).

My research in this area began by arguing that there are a number of challenges Postmodernism presents to Christianity, which are quite real. These key postmodernist issues were identified and their historical roots traced and examined to determine how modern evangelical Christians may encounter them in evangelistic situations. It has been the position in this thesis that these issues represent formidable opponents that require consideration for ensuring successful evangelistic campaigns.

The first postmodernist challenge to Christianity examined in this study was the concept of relativistic truth. Arguments were made that it alone serves as

the foundational point from which all other postmodernist positions emerge. Two other issues arising from relative truth that were identified included linguistic relativism and philosophical pluralism. Regarding language, postmodernists assert that finite human language cannot measure up to the standards that evangelicals require – requirements that include the ability to communicate infinite, transcendent, meaningful and objective truth. However, postmodernists overlook that theology teaches *finitum non capax infinitum*, or “the finite cannot grasp the infinite”. Christianity affirms an apprehensive knowledge of God, but not a comprehensive knowledge, with analogous language proving to be adequate but not perfect.

When a non-absolutist view of truth is combined with linguistic relativism, a perfect atmosphere is then created for the next postmodernist challenge, which is philosophical pluralism. If truth is indeed relative and any spoken or written authority is nothing but an interpretation that cannot possibly be objective, then a very reasonable conclusion is that all religious points of view are equal and must be acknowledged as valid. The thinking is that if all people have equal worth, then all ideas must have equal value as well. This being the case, philosophical pluralism says that it is perfectly acceptable to say ‘this is true’ as long as it is not followed with ‘and therefore, that is false’.

The final challenge noted in this study dealt with contemporary analysis showing a current perception of Christianity that is overwhelmingly negative. Spirituality is viewed positively by postmodernists, but not organized religions such as Christianity. The primary driving factors that lead to this mood, according to the research examined in this work, include the view that Christianity no longer represents what its Founder had in mind, and that it has lost the compassion and caring preached by Christ. In short, the complaint is that the message and the messengers’ lives do not match.

Having identified these four challenges, the next step in this study was to make an attempt at applying the apologetic framework of the Apostle Paul to the 21<sup>st</sup> century postmodernist culture.

## **7.4 THE APPLICATION OF THE PAULINE APOLOGETIC FRAMEWORK TO POSTMODERNISM**

This study reached the conclusion that the Pauline apologetic framework as outlined in the Scriptures was prescriptive in nature and not merely descriptive (cf. Chapter Three, 3.5). That being the case, an attempt was made to apply Paul's *apologia* to Postmodernism and see how it might address the key challenges identified earlier in this work. First, a recommended proposal was put forth that utilizes a baseline of topic discussion points (truth, antithesis, God, Bible, Jesus, love) previously identified in Paul's *apologia*. Each topic, it was argued, has a dimension that natural humanity will be able to understand, as well as an aspect that humankind will not be able to comprehend without the help of the Holy Spirit. Because each person is unique, it was argued that evangelists will need to exercise wisdom in how they should speak to each individual as Paul recommended (Col. 4:6) so they can determine at what point in the framework's topical points they must begin to lead the person to Christ.

It was argued that in order to combat the challenges identified in Chapter Five, those using Paul's three witness apologetics should speak to three different facets of the postmodernist: their rational, spiritual, and moral being. As a rational being, despite the noetic effects of sin, it was argued that the postmodernist is still equipped by God to respond to rational arguments and proof. For the rational dimension of the postmodernist, Paul's message supplies an objective basis for the subjective salvation experience. His method provides logic needed for recognition of truth, especially for the acknowledgement of antithesis, which is necessary to successfully neutralize the doctrine of religious pluralism. Lastly, his manner offers testimony to a rational person looking for

existential proof that the message of transformation being preached through the gospel actually results in transformed lives.

For the spiritual dimension of the postmodernist, an argument was made that the message of Paul supplies special propositional revelation necessary for salvation that the postmodernist cannot obtain on his own. In the life of the unbeliever, faith can only be produced in conjunction with the Holy Spirit. Paul's method centers upon the monergistic work of the Holy Spirit that alters both the cognitive and affective functions of the unbelieving postmodernist so they will embrace, rather than reject, the gospel message. Data was presented that showed the postmodernist will not accept a message that conflicts with his intrinsic value as a spiritual being. Paul's manner addresses this with a life that is totally consistent with his message. Such a life is made possible only by the power of the Spirit, Who dwells in all believers (Rom. 8:9).

Finally, for the moral dimension of the unbeliever, Paul's message acts as the communication mechanism for the truth of sin, guilt before God, a need to repent, and an answer for the current moral state of humankind. Because Paul's message would not be favorably received by fallen man, his method required a full reliance on the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's role was to address the moral aspect of humankind by bringing about the conviction of sin (as promised by Jesus in John 16:8) as well as empowering the individual to overcome sin via a walk with Him (as stated by Paul in Gal. 5:16). In regard to Paul's manner, this part of his *apologia* helps overcome the claims of moral hypocrisy aimed at Christianity by the current culture by serving to showcase that the moral message of the gospel is indeed practiced by those espousing it.

As a classically trained apologist, I admit that I was hoping to find that Paul utilized classical apologetics with his evangelistic prospects. However, the evidence from this investigation points away from a purely classical approach and instead is explicitly described in the book of Acts and the Pauline corpus as something different. The three-fold framework of message, method, and

manner is a combination of cerebral thought and logic, the mysterious and regenerative work of the Spirit in an unbeliever's life, and an emotional touch of care that is coupled with a marriage of the messenger with the teachings of Christ on how to love one another.

## 7.5 CONCLUSION

When preaching in the city of Athens, the content of Paul's message caused the philosophers of that city to respond: "You are bringing some strange things to our ears" (Acts 17:20). The word "strange", ξενίζοντα, can mean that a state of astonishment, shock, or surprise has resulted because of the novelty of the thing being spoken about or experienced. As this study concludes, there are two last observations that should be noted, one negative and one positive, both of which arise from the notion of the Christian gospel as being "strange".

The first point to reflect on is the fact that Paul's "strange" apologetic stance did not make him popular in Athens, or anywhere else for that matter. The author of Acts does not record that Paul obtained employment as a philosopher on Mars Hill. To the contrary, the book of Acts records stiff opposition to Paul's *apologia* over thirty distinct times (9:23-25,29; 13:8, 45, 50; 14:2, 5, 19; 16:19-24; 17:5, 13, 32; 18:6, 12; 19:9, 23; 20:3, 19; 21:27-39; 22:18; 23:2, 12; 24:1-9, 27; 25:2-3, 7, 9, 24; 26:21; 28:22). This is not a point to be overlooked by today's apologist who might wrongly try to measure "success" in their employment of the Pauline apologetic framework by the lack of resistance they encounter. Secularists, pantheists, polytheists, syncretists, and other non-Christians are mostly unconcerned by the promotion of one more deity/spirituality in Postmodernism's cultural cafeteria. But when the evangelist proclaims the exclusive message of the Gospel of Jesus being the only Way, Truth, and Life, there is historical evidence via the life of Paul that such a "strange" message will result in little tolerance from its shocked audience who will likely turn around and charge the apologist with being intolerant.

The evangelist in Postmodernism should not despair over this, but instead recall that the Scriptures relay the truth that the message will certainly be a stumbling block and foolishness to some (1 Cor. 1:23), but to those whom God calls it will manifest as the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24). The astonishment that those being called by God and evangelized feel is due to the genuine sense of spiritual concern that exists in the apologist for them (as it did with Paul, cf. Acts 17:16). The shock they experience will be because the message coming to them does not consist of intellectual snobbery or scorn as the negative picture of Christianity is sometimes portrayed, but instead is one laced with sincerity and respect. Finally, the only surprise will be the robustness of the Christian's message, method, and manner that convincingly speak to the postmodernist's rational, spiritual, and moral being. In Postmodernism, this type of evangelism may indeed be considered "strange", but when such an authentic apologetic is presented with the power of the Spirit and a genuine concern for those called of God, such strangeness should certainly be welcomed.

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