

The role of logical argument, persuasion and evidence in Christian apologetics with reference to Matthew 22, John 5, Acts 26 & Titus 1

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Chapter 1- Research Proposal

1.1 Title

The role of logical argument, persuasion and evidence in Christian apologetics, with reference to Matthew 22, John 5, Acts 26 & Titus 1.

Key words: Apologetics, logical argument, evangelism, refutation, evidence, persuasion, fideism.

1.2 Abstract

This dissertation is an investigative study on the case for Christian apologetics from the New Testament. It focuses specifically on the use of logical argumentation and evidence by Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul in the New Testament. The context of this work is within the South African community, which as a society contains a variety of worldviews, many of which stand in opposition to the truth claims of the Christian faith. Christians are for the most part ill-equipped in dealing with these non-Christian ideas. The end result often leads to a crisis of faith or even the “shipwrecking” of many Christians’ faith. This study includes two articles both focussing on the elements of logical argumentation and evidence which will serve to better equip Christians. The first article focusses on the essential role of argumentation, persuasion and logic in apologetic dialogue. The second article focusses on the importance of case-building and evidence within Christian apologetic dialogue, and also a critique on the idea of fideism. This struggle of ideas is both ideological and spiritual. It is often most acute for Christian students at university as they are confronted with the different worldviews of their fellow students and lecturers.

1.3. Background

1.3.1 Personal background to the study

I came to Potchefstroom in 2014 during the second year of my undergraduate studies in Theology to study at the Faculty of Theology of North West University. I was surprised at the variety of religious beliefs, ideas, and philosophies that I encountered on NWU campus. My encounter with those who adhered to these beliefs and ideas led to frustration, confusion, and doubt on my part. Moreover, I discovered that I shared this disposition with a number of Christian friends. In short, my fellow Christians and I were incapable of defending our faith against various questions and objections raised against Christianity. Furthermore, there was a great shortage of Christians who were able to make a positive persuasive case for Christianity. I was taken aback even further upon hearing how many Christians were ignorant and sceptical of their own beliefs. The end result was that some of these Christians walked away from the faith. I was also struck by how easily a person could be influenced by unbiblical ideas or philosophies rooted in the culture and society, many of which have crept into the local churches, without Christians noticing. One of these ideas is that of fideism, which answers questions and objections to the faith with platitudes like: “Don’t ask questions, just have faith” or “If you provide reasons, then there is no need for faith!”. The fact that I was studying theology did not make me immune to some of these influences. Fortunately, I encountered an international campus apologetics organization known as Ratio Christi. This organization emphasizes the persuasive proclamation and reasoned defence of the Christian faith – and this is where my faith was strengthened. I learned how to defend my faith, and my knowledge of the essential nature of Christianity was deepened.

1.3.2 General background to the study

While the Christian church has been battling false ideas since its inception 2000 years ago, the reality has become even more apparent in our current global age of information overdose, the myriad of ideas, religious pluralism, and cults (Conway, 2013). Apologetics is now more important than ever. Crafford (2015:245) states that all across the world people are becoming more aware of the multi-religious context in which they live as the consequence of globalization. It includes the rapid growth of Islam that now challenges Christianity as the largest world religion. Other challenges include the secularization of large parts of mainly Western¹ society which has caused millions to become estranged from the Christian church. Nowhere else is this secularization best

¹ Reno (2017:1) indicates that after World War II, the nations of Europe were secularized to an unprecedented degree. Owing to America’s close relationship with Europe it may also follow suit. Although US church attendance has not declined in any significant degree over the last three generations, the culture has become more secular. However, at the same time Christianity grew at rapid rates around the world in places like Africa, South America and Asia.

exemplified, but at university campuses. The end result is a spiritual vacuum that needs to be filled. Many people in the West have turned to Eastern ideologies in an effort to fill this vacuum.

McDowell (2006:13) provides some information regarding the situation in the USA that demands serious consideration. Only 33% of church attending youth claim that the church will play part in their lives when they leave home. In McDowell's interaction with various denominational leaders, it has been estimated that between 69% and 94% of their young people are leaving the church after high school with very few returning. He notes that many young people remain passionate about spiritual matters, but the specific spirituality remains a question. He found that 63% of Christian youth don't believe that Jesus is the Son of the one true God; 58% believe all faiths teach equally valid truths; 51% don't believe Jesus rose from the dead; 65% don't believe Satan is a real entity and 68% don't believe the Holy Spirit is a real entity. Their ideas differ from the important aspects of basic orthodox Christian doctrines, leaving one to wonder whether the ideas are still Christian at all. In more recent studies the Barna Group (2018) conducted a survey which revealed that 51% of American churchgoers did not know what the Great Commission² was. When given the option of identifying in which passage the Great Commission is found, 33% did not know if any of the passages express it and 31% identified the wrong passage. With a decline in the understanding of basic Christian doctrine and belief – so also comes the decline in answering to the Great Commission by carrying out the Gospel.

These challenges within the West are not only significant for the USA. Concerning the situation in Europe Doyno (2016:1) indicates:

“Pews are emptying, churches have gone on sale, atheism and agnosticism are on the rise, and Christian morality has been repudiated in major legislation dealing with life, death, sexuality, and marriage. Formerly the very symbol of cultural Christianity, Europe has become hostile to the faith that once gave it so much life and hope.”

As for the South African situation Vorster (1997:14) states that macro level changes affect the church as a whole. Changes that took place in the USA and Europe a decade ago are currently being manifested here and now in South Africa. The same ideas influencing young Christians in the USA and Europe are also influencing people in Africa and South Africa.

Some of the key apologetic issues that Christians face today according to Geisler (2011) include (but are not limited to):

² Matthew 28:16-20 which is the command from Christ to make, baptize and teach disciples from all the nations of the world.

- Relativism, which denies absolute truth.
- Religious pluralism, which states that all views are equally true.
- Metaphysical naturalism, which denies any possibility of the supernatural and states that the natural world is all that there is.

These and many other ideas and worldviews in opposition to the Christian faith are to be found in South Africa. Van Wyk (2005:1374) lists a parallel account of these three key apologetic issues for Christians in South Africa, namely:

- Questions about the truth of Christian claims.
- Religious pluralism.
- The relationship between faith and science.

With the experience on campus, interaction with local churches, interaction with Christian and non-Christian students, this researcher suspects that the condition of Christianity in South Africa is not yet in a dire situation like that of the West. However, Conway (2013) points out that the church is in a confused era undergirded by doubt. He explains that church leaders need to be effectively equipped through studying theology, history, philosophy and apologetics because many leaders in the church are incapable of responding effectively to objections against the Christian faith. If the leaders are unable to address the objections, then the congregants will certainly be in no position to do so.

Therefore, one of the central motivations to conduct this study is to ascertain the condition of Christians' beliefs and is an attempt at offering some assistance to fortify and strengthen the faith of South African Christians in general, and South African Christian students in particular.

1.4 Problem Statement

The discussion about the role of logical argumentation, persuasion, and evidence in Christian apologetics, as determined by the analysis of key New Testament passages, is the focus of this study. Matthew 22, John 5, Acts 26 and Titus 1 are the New Testament passages analysed to determine the nature, role and importance of persuasive logical argumentation and evidence in apologetic dialogue and evangelism.

Although there are a number of passages that could be utilized, these passages are specifically selected for the guiding principles they provide for the purpose of this study.

Matthew 22 narrates Jesus confronting the Herodians, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. He addresses their objections respectively in turn and then proceeds to raise a question of his own

to them. Blomberg (1992:331) indicates that Jesus' response was indeed astonishing to everyone. Jesus dissolved the false dilemma presented to Him by alluding to what both the Pharisees and the Herodians believed.

In Titus 1 is where Paul writes to Titus in Crete concerning the qualifications that constitute an elder. Besides having a Christ-like character they are commanded to teach sound doctrine and have to be able to refute those who oppose said doctrine. Griffin & Lea (1992:285) indicate that the teaching capacity according to the Word of God is a key element that establishes the basis for the elder's doctrinal function as teacher of and apologist for the gospel. From their devotion to the trustworthy word they both edify others in this trustworthy word and rebuke those who oppose it.

The two passages will serve as the groundwork for sound principles to provide possible guidelines for Christian apologetics.

In John 5 Christ had healed a man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath where after the Jews came to confront him. In the rest of the chapter Jesus explains to the Jews who he is – the Son of God and Messiah. He rationally justifies these claims to the Jews and gives his defence by appealing to five witnesses. Geisler & Zukeran (2009:15) state that Jesus, in His defence, proceeds to provide some of the clearest and strongest teachings regarding his divine nature as the Son of God.

Acts 26 depicts Paul giving his *apologia* before King Agrippa and the Roman governor Festus. Fernando (1998:600-602) depicts that the case for the resurrection as well the role of reason in evangelism is essential in Paul's court case before Agrippa and Festus. Paul not only refers to the fact of Jesus' resurrection as a public event but also to the fulfilment of the words of the prophets concerning the Messiah.

In light of the aforementioned exposition of these passages it will also be determined whether this will be an answer to the contrary position of fideism.

In the current age of scepticism, people often ask questions which serve to undermine faith and reinforce doubt. Van Wyk (2005:1374) emphasises that it is part of the realization of the churches' mission to answer the questions and objections of those within the church. These questions must be addressed on a grass roots level in the local church - especially in those churches in proximity to universities where young Christians are confronted with divergent worldviews.

In his 5 years at university, the present researcher had encountered numerous students who struggling in their faith, and who have then consequently sought answers from their church

leadership – only to be disappointed. Often these earnestly seeking students were met with superficial responses like: “Just have faith,” or “Don’t ask questions like that, just believe,” or “Doubting is a sin”. This confirms with what Sproul (2003:17) describes as the position of many Christians within contemporary times. There is an imperative that Christians ought not to be engaged in any attempt to substantiate the truth claims of Christianity as faith and evidence are incompatible.

The concerns and objections towards Christianity of many non-Christians were also quite telling. Their responses are often along these lines: “Christianity is just blind faith”; “Christianity is intellectually vacuous” or “I cannot commit myself to something that inhibits my freedom to think”.³ The problem is exacerbated because the former statements by Christians serve to reinforce the non-Christians’ view of Christianity as a system of belief that neglects or denigrates the mind. Moreover, this is the case when considering that one of the major influential figures of the New Atheism, Richard Dawkins, says that the main strength of any religious faith is that it does not require any rational justification (Dawkins, 2006:23).

It is not surprising that many Christians are struggling in the intellectual climate of a university and fail to engage with non-Christians in fruitful dialogue with respect to their Christian faith. It can also be seen in the remark by Vorster (1997:6) that many people are not content with monological preaching with truths being assumed as axioms; many of these assumptions are now being called into question, not only by non-Christians, but also by Christians who had not found substantial answers.

In South Africa, a diverse cultural and linguistic society, known as the “Rainbow Nation, Christians need to become aware of the ideas and worldviews that permeate society. This rich diversity of ideas and culture is especially promulgated at the universities in South Africa. The strategic importance of the universities in a society (and South Africa is no exception) is well expressed by Malik (1980:293):

“It is totally vain, it is indeed childish, to tackle these problems as though all were well, in morals and in the fundamental orientation of the will and the mind, in the great halls of learning. Where do the leaders in these realms come from? They all come from the universities. What they are fed, intellectually, morally, spiritually, personally, in the fifteen or twenty years they spend in the school and university is the decisive question. It is there that the foundations of character and mind and outlook and conviction and attitude and spirit are laid.”

³ The quotes from Christians and non-Christians above are verbatim statements from my encounters with students on campus.

Malik's comments need to be considered alongside the change of modern institutions of higher learning within the last half century which has tended more towards a negative view of Christianity. According to Budziszewski (1999:15) the climate on a typical contemporary campus is one which, if not hostile, at minimum challenges the convictions of the Christian. However it is not the hostility or criticism in itself that is the problem.⁴ Rather, it is the shrinking back of Christians at the universities and their inability at conversing and responding to these criticisms raised against their faith. Malik (1980:292) provides an accurate depiction of the dire situation that is faced by Christians at the university.

“What can the poor Church even at its best do, what can evangelization even at its most inspired do, what can the poor family even at its purest and noblest do, if the children spend between fifteen and twenty years of their life – and indeed the most formative period of their life – in school and college in an atmosphere of formal denial of any relevance of God and spirit and soul and faith to the formation of their mind? The enormity of what is happening is beyond words.”

One of the greatest dangers facing Christianity in general is anti-intellectualism. The question must be asked whether this concept is even Biblical, especially when viewing figures like Jesus and Paul and their “intellectual” engagements with those who opposed them. Njoroge, a Kenyan scholar, agrees with Malik's sentiments with reference to the painful effects that this kind of thinking has had in Africa. Njoroge (2009:4) states:

“Drought, famine, poverty, and disease continue to claim lives throughout large parts of Africa. As a result, physical needs receive the greatest attention from those who feel moved enough to act on behalf of the people of Africa. But despite the seriousness of the physical needs, I am convinced that the biggest problem Africa faces is ideological.”

Njoroge (2009:4) continues by affirming that it is necessary to address the physical needs, but these will only offer a temporary solution. If a lasting solution is to be reached then the root cause, which is ideological, needs to be addressed. He points to the Rwandan genocide. The majority of the country saw themselves as Christian, yet the horrific genocide still took place. Clearly the ideologies that drove this horrifying event were not properly addressed. Among other challenges that Christianity in Africa faces, Turaki (2007:138) lists the revival of neo-paganism, religious cults, and syncretism as some of the most prevalent. These internal African religious movements are

⁴ Jesus indicates in John 15:18-25 that hostility towards those who follow Him is inevitable. He indicates in verse 20 specifically: “A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also...” Therefore, as Christians it must come as no surprise when we face resistance of some form or another. However, it is essential to note the manner in which we respond to it.

advanced by external ideologies from the West like the revival of paganism as well as the religious vitality and fervour of the Prosperity Gospel movement.

This rich historical tradition is also evident within Africa. Turaki (2007:130) writes of two historical forms of Christianity in Africa. The first form can be titled North African Hellenistic Christianity, which had its origins directly from the Palestinian birthplace of Christianity. Unfortunately, this form was eventually wiped out by Islam after it conquered North Africa in the 7th century AD. The second form that is noted is that which came through the vigorous missionary work from the missionaries in the West between the 15th and 21st century AD. Njoroge (2009:4) argues that the latter stripe of Christianity that was established in Africa was for the most part a pietistic evangelicalism, which was already in an intellectual retreat in the West, and separated from the intellectual legacy of Christendom.⁵ This intellectual legacy, which the former form of North African Hellenistic Christianity may also be a part of, had served to produce first-rate Christian scientists, moral philosophers, political thinkers, artists, business entrepreneurs, etc. In turn, the foundation of this legacy must also be realised as a legacy rooted within the revelation of God. When viewing the broader range of the Bible in general, and the passages in this study in particular, the roots of this rich intellectual tradition becomes clearer.

It is also clear that this development of the Christian mind is needed for Christians in Africa, and South Africa is no exception. Christians need to have the ability to effectively defend against and engage with contrary ideas and beliefs which are rooted within the society and culture. It follows from this that the local Church should also have a role in this effort. Vorster (1997:6) indicates that the church is, sociologically, one of many institutions that exert an influence in life. However, for the modern person the activities of the church do not cover all the domains of their life and do not have a dominant position any longer in their life.

A summary of the problem that confronts the modern church is presented by C.S. Lewis. In 1945, Lewis (1945:90-91), in his address to Christian preachers, explains the difficulty of preaching to a modern audience. He contends that this difficulty is to help the audience understand that the preaching of Christianity is not a matter of opinion (nor that it is merely for the good of society). Rather, it is in fact preached as the truth. Lewis (1945:93) indicates that inviting people to a lecture of half an hour from the Christian point of view, only for them to then plunge back into the world of many different worldviews, will make the task of long term change impossible. He argues that

⁵ However, it must be noted that this is not a generalization with contempt for those who planted the Gospel in Africa. In fact, every single Christian on this continent is indebted to the hard work, sacrifice and obedience of those Christian missionaries. It would be ignorant to state that they did not have a great societal impact as they helped establish education, healthcare, developed indigenous written languages etc. This has left a lasting impact on millions of lives. Therefore, we must honour their sacrifice all the more by teaching others to also love God with their minds.

Christians ought to, in their respective fields and walks of life, bring the truth of Christianity to the public sphere, though as the underlying and inevitable conclusion in their honest science. The essence of the task of every Christian to bring the truth of Christianity to the public sphere may be summarized as follows:

“Whether public or private, Christian missional engagement should be in the forefront in developing appropriate arenas and attitudes for mutual dialogue, debate and critique. A key reason for this is the fact that the issue of truth is a fundamental concern for the Christian church, if it is to remain missional both in its key identity and its essential activities.” (Dahle, 2013:22)

In the light of these various challenges the central research question is: *What is the importance and role of logical argument, persuasion and evidence in Christian apologetics according to Matthew 22, John 5, Acts 26 and Titus 1?*

Specific questions to be asked include:

1. What is the role of logical argument and persuasion in apologetic dialogue according to Matthew 22 and Titus 1?
2. What is the role of evidence/rational justification, as opposed to fideism, in apologetic dialogue according to John 5 and Acts 26?

1.5 Aim

The main aim of this study is to scripturally demonstrate the importance and validity of persuasive logical argumentation and rational justification of Christian belief in order to better equip Christians for the task of apologetics and evangelism.

1.6 Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To demonstrate the importance of logical argumentation and persuasion in Christian apologetics by exegetical study and evaluation of Titus 1 and Matthew 22.
2. To draw key principles from the studied passages in order to provide some general guidelines for Christians to engage in effective Christian apologetics and evangelism.
3. To demonstrate the importance of rational justification in Christian apologetics by exegetical study and evaluation of John 5 and Acts 26.
4. In light of the studied passages engage in a critical evaluation of fideism.

1.7 The central theoretical argument

The central theoretical argument of this study is that: according to Matt 22, Acts 26, John 5 and Titus 1 the construction of sound logical arguments and rational justification for the arguments in the passages essential to the task of Christian apologetics and subsequently, that the opposing idea of fideism is unbiblical

1.8 Methodology

This study encompasses a comparative literary analysis in which relevant literature and audio-visual sources are utilized.

This study also encompasses the exegesis of four relevant Biblical passages according to the grammatical-historical method of interpretation. What this method of interpretation consists of is a study of the words and sentences according to the way they were normally used by the speakers of the original language as well as their historical context (Howe, 2003:2; Kaiser & Silva, 2007:21; Tolar, 2002:21).

Howe (2003:2) states that utilizing this method entails that the Bible is interpreted in the light of the original languages, historical/cultural setting, literary genre, the universal and particular principles of communication and understanding and finally the preunderstanding and presuppositions of the interpreter.

It is essential to take note of the differing apologetic methodologies. However, this study will not focus on the discussion of the best methodology of apologetics, but will focus on the concept of Christian apologetics in general. The essence of this approach is depicted in the simplistic definition of apologetics by Beilby (2011:18),

“Christian apologetics seeks to defend what orthodox Christians have claimed about God through history”,

as well as C.S. Lewis (1945:90),

“We are to defend Christianity itself – the faith preached by the Apostles, attested by the Martyrs, embodied in the Creeds, expounded by the Fathers.”

1.9 Concept clarification

The following concepts require clarification

Apologetics: According to Beilby (2011:11-12) apologetics, in its simplest terms, means the attempt to defend a particular belief or system of beliefs against objections. Craig (2008:15) defines apologetics as the discipline that seeks to provide rational justification for the truth of Christianity. This term appears approximately nineteen times in the New Testament. The term is derived from the Greek word ‘*apologia*’ and was initially utilized within a legal context in ancient Greece. What this entailed was that the defendant would provide a defence by literally ‘speaking away’ any false accusations that are raised against him. Apologetics does not just entail a defence, but an ‘offense’ also. Defensively, it serves to answer objections which serve to further strengthen the faith of the believer. Offensively, it entails the making of a positive case for Christianity which serves as a display to unbelievers concerning the truth of the Christian faith (Sproul, 2003:16; Craig, 2008:15). For the purposes of this study, the term apologetics will follow the holistic definition that is provided by Beilby (2011:31):

“Christian apologetics is the task of defending and commending the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ in a Christ-like, context sensitive and audience specific manner.”

Local Church: Erickson (2013:957) provides a useful definition of the church as the whole body of those who through Christ’s death have been reconciled with God and have received new life – and in particular are local groupings of these believers which represent the whole body of Christ. It is my firm conviction that this study on the need and the role of apologetics is relevant to every single Christian congregation, regardless of denomination. An important note that Beilby (2011:19) makes is that there are indeed theological differences between denominations. However, apologetics deals foremost with the essentials of the Christian faith. These essentials include dogmas which all Christians, regardless of denomination, ascribe to like: the existence of God, the deity of Christ, the Trinity and whatsoever is affirmed in the core creeds of Christianity. Therefore, when referring to “local church” it also denotes any church that holds to the central tenants of the Christian faith.

Truth: It is essential to clarify what is meant by the term ‘truth’ in this study – for it cannot be used without clarification regarding what is meant with the term truth. Truth is an unclear, vague, illusive, and subjective concept in our postmodern discourse. With regards to the definition of truth, Kreeft (2014:145) provides a most basic definition: “telling it like it is”. To be more specific though: “truth is then basically the conformity of thought to thing; mind to reality, thought’s subject to thought’s object” (Kreeft, 2014:145).

This definition of Kreeft is known as the correspondence theory of truth, so to reiterate: when something is claimed to be true then it has to correspond with reality. Therefore, when there is discussion on the truth of the Christian faith it means that what it claims, like Jesus Christ rising from the dead, really happened within space-time reality. The nature of truth would then entail that it is objective and binding to all people regardless of opinion or feeling. To demonstrate the significance of this, Bediako (1996: 38) states that the essential focus of the Christian affirmation, which is the embracing of truth, is not the assertion of a formula, i.e. just merely intellectual assent. As a matter of fact, it is the recognition, in body, mind and soul, of a triumph based on events in actual history.

Logical argument: Basically what this concept entails is the application of the principles of logic to argumentation. This may be clarified in the definition that Geisler & Brooks (1990:12) ascribe to logic:

“Logic is the study of right reason or valid inferences and the attending fallacies, formal and informal.”

This definition may be expanded even further with reference to the model of the three acts of the mind namely: apprehension, judgement and reasoning. Each respective act is logically expressed in terms, propositions and arguments. The end of each respective act is to reach clarity, truth, and rational validity. Each respective act of the mind has failed when the terms are unclear/ambiguous, when the propositions are false and when there is a formal logical fallacy in the reasoning. All three of these acts are in unison with one another. Only when the criteria for all three acts have been met in clear terms, when the propositions are true, and when the reasoning is valid, only then the conclusion, necessarily following from the premises, is undeniably true. (Kreeft, 2014:32-33; Sullivan, 2005: 4-6).

Fideism: The Stanford encyclopaedia of philosophy (2016) refers to Alvin Plantinga in providing a formal definition of fideism:

“exclusive or basic reliance upon faith alone, accompanied by a consequent disparagement of reason and utilized especially in the pursuit of philosophical or religious truth.”

Boa & Bowman (2005:338) provide a similar definition of fideism which argues that the truths of faith cannot and should not be justified rationally. Furthermore, fideism entails that faith alone is the only way to the truths of Christianity.

In light of the definition that has been provided for fideism it is best at this time to take note of a distinction. What is being addressed and evaluated in this study is a particular philosophical idea which makes the positive case that faith is the only way to truth and that it does not require any reason and evidence. In fact, this idea indicates that reason and evidence is in direct conflict with faith. What is not being addressed in this study is the situation in which a believer has faith, even though they may not have a vast array of evidence and arguments to support it at any given point in time. This does not fall under the idea of fideism as believers in this situation are still open to reason and evidence. They may never have thought about it before, or they might be content with the simplistic reasons for their faith at the time, however, this is not yet fideism. Therefore, it is the crucial distinction between fideism, as a positive contended philosophical idea, and the personal state of a believer's faith.

1.10 Ethical concerns

According to the Risk Levels, used by universities in South Africa, the present research should be classified at the minimal or low risk level. The research gathers data by literature review already available in the public domain.

1.11 Division of chapters

Chapter 1 – Research Proposal

Chapter 2 – Article 1: The role of refutation and argument in Christian apologetic dialogue with reference to Matthew 22 and Titus 1

Chapter 3 – Article 2: The role of evidence in Christian apologetic dialogue as opposed to Fideism with reference to John 5 and Acts 26

Chapter 4 - Conclusion

Chapter 2 - Article 1: The role of refutation and argument in Christian apologetic dialogue with reference to Matthew 22 and Titus 1

2.1 Abstract

This is a study on selected passages from the New Testament that will serve to establish and demonstrate the nature of argument and persuasion which are essential within effective Christian apologetics. The mandate for the need of argumentation is found in Titus 1:9 as Paul sets essential standards for Christian leadership, among these, the ability to refute false teachers. The example of how effective argumentation and persuasion can be done can be derived from Matthew 22:15-45. This encompasses Jesus' dialogue with the religious leaders and particular attention is given to how Jesus responds to objections and then His own questions. By abstracting principles from these texts a brief guideline will be provided to assist Christians in effective Christian apologetic dialogue.

2.2 Introduction

The field of apologetics entails providing a defence, basically rational justification, for Christian belief. This concept stems from the commandment in 1 Peter 3:15-16;⁶ here Christians are instructed to be always ready at all times to provide a defence, an *apologia*, when questions and objections arise about the reason for their visible hope of their faith.⁷ The goal of apologetics in Christianity is two-fold in defending, answering arguments and objections, as well as contending, making positive persuasive arguments, for the Christian faith (Beilby, 2011:17). To be able to defend and to make a persuasive argument, it presupposes that one needs to know the nature of argumentation and how it should be done.

The instruction in 1 Peter 3 is that one ought to be ready to give an *apologia* – a well-structured answer as was used in Roman law.⁸ Readiness to give a careful and persuasive account clearly implies preparation. The preparation involves knowledge of the position which is defended and the objections that are brought against it. To express an articulate defence and a refutation of an opposing view furthermore presupposes familiarity with the rules for evaluating arguments that are present within logic (Kreeft, 2014:1-2; Moreland & Craig, 2003:28).

The reference to “argument” might incite the image of a hostile, proud and pompous individual which only seeks to win debates and display intellectual superiority. ‘Argumentation’ in apologetics may be thought of as being something that is thoroughly unchristian and unbiblical.⁹ There are those who claim that the emphasis apologetic enterprise places on the importance of human reason disparages the work of the Holy Spirit (Guinness, 2015:49). However, when the approaches displayed by Paul in Titus 1 and Jesus in Matthew 22 are studied, this is not and should not be the case.

⁶ “...but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame.”

⁷ Stoker (2017:43) explains it as follows: “One Peter 3:15 (English Standard Version [ESV]), urges Christians to be involved in apologetics – ‘always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.’ The importance of preparation and of the use of reason in apologetics is described, as well as the personal character thereof (‘hope that is in you’) and the way of doing ‘with gentleness and respect’.”

⁸ See Paul’s example in Acts 24.

⁹ Moreland (1997:114) makes the distinction between argument and being argumentative. In using an argument, it simply defined as supporting a conclusion on the basis of preceding premises. Being argumentative is a defensive personality defect. Therefore, it is essential to distinguish that Christians are called to argue but not the argumentative.

2.3 Titus 1:5-16: The command

In Titus 1:5-16 Paul directs Titus on the appointing of elders in the churches of Crete with the purpose of strengthening the churches in sound doctrine, discipleship and good moral leadership. The elders must also be instrumental to guard the churches against false teachers which seek to spread their heresies among the members.

Paul, as the former pastor and church planter in Crete had good reason to write these words to Titus as his successor. Crete, being an island situated in the Mediterranean south of the Aegean Sea, was an essential commercial weigh station for the seafaring trade. While being a key point on the trade route, it had been the ideal setting in which various philosophies and religions ranging from all around the known world could congregate (Towner; 2006:678). It created an interesting and dynamic melting pot of different ideas and religions – many of these being in stark contrast to Christianity. It is reasonable to state that this could have been similar to aspects of the pluralistic society in which many Christians find themselves within the 21st century. At the same time, Crete was just the sort of strategic location for which Paul and his companions would wish to firmly establish the Christian Gospel as it would serve as a spring board to the rest of the known world. While there were Christian churches present on the island of Crete which could be utilised in this endeavour, it seems that these churches were still young in the faith (Carson & Moo, 2005:583).

The lack of a thanksgiving in the beginning of the letter, while thanksgiving is present in most of Paul's other letters, is noteworthy. It insinuates that there is nothing yet to be noteworthy in the life of the believers on Crete as the churches have only been established quite recently (Genade, 2011:22). In verse 5 Paul is instructing Titus to "straighten out what was left unfinished". In conjunction with this command, Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders in every town. Knight (1992: 287-288) states that it can be inferred that both Paul and Titus were successful in evangelizing various towns on the island but did not have time to equip believers by setting in order the churches and ensuring the appointment of elders. An important part of the task of the elders that Titus had to appoint was focused on strengthening the church doctrinally and addressing false doctrine.

A church that is still young in faith and insight in the pluralistic setting will find itself very susceptible to contrary ideas in the culture. Therefore, there is an urgent need of strong and mature leadership to teach and guard against error. In fact, the situation in Crete might seem even more ominous when viewing Titus 1:10-16. It is not just the general ideas that were present in the culture, but there were teachers within the churches which intentionally taught false doctrines, thereby deceiving many within the church. To understand the reason Paul specifically instructed Titus to appoint elders to be a remedy in the situation there, it is essential to note the expectations placed

on the person seeking to be an elder within the church. In Acts 20:28-31, Paul is addressing the Ephesian elders. In this passage in Acts there is already a brief summary on the nature and duty of an elder in the church. It includes defending the church against false teachers (*savage wolves*) and their teaching. Because of the importance of this, the pastoral epistles of Timothy and Titus provide a significant expansion on the qualifications of elders, for instance in 1 Timothy 3 the elders are instructed to take care of “the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth”.

2.3.1 Ethical and character qualities of an elder (Verse 5-8)

In Titus 1:6-8 it is made clear that an elder, being an entrusted steward of God, must reflect a Christ-like life in order to be qualified in becoming an elder. Towner (2006:681) indicates that in this section the key qualification for holding the position of an elder is “blamelessness”. The specific qualities of this measurement of character of being blameless is applied into a framework which encompasses a person’s familial, personal, interpersonal as well as ministry life. It underlines the authenticity of his testimony.

2.3.2 Ministry requirements of an elder (Verse 9-16)

The focus then shifts. In verse 9 where there is an emphasis on the ministry requirements of an elder, elders are to teach sound doctrine and refute those who are opposing it. Taking note of verse 9, a key presupposing factor of teaching and refuting is that elders are to hold fast to the trustworthy Word that was taught to them. Griffin & Lea (1992:285) indicate that with regards to this phrase it means orthodox biblical teaching. This is the apostolic teaching of the Word of God they had received from Paul. Towner (2006:691) would concur in stating that this is the same divine gospel that drives Paul’s ministry as seen in verse 3. The requirement of holding on to the trustworthy message indicates an unwavering adherence similar to what the prophets in the Old Testament focused on, namely “clinging to” the law, the covenant, and especially to God Himself.

Genade (2011:26) states that the conditions for an elder culminate in verse 9 with the specific principle that “he must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught”. Along with the aforementioned requirements of mature Christ-like character, the relationship of the elder to the Word is vital. It is also essential to note the parallel list of requirements for elders in 1 Timothy 3. In 1 Timothy 3:2 it is indicated that an elder must have the capacity to teach. The capacity to teach presupposes that one must be an ardent student of the Word. This further substantiates the point that the elders’ relationship to the Word is essential. Mounce (2000:392) indicates an implied conviction of Paul in this verse, namely that if members are not devoted to the truth, they cannot qualify for being an elder. In concurrence with what Griffin & Lea (1992:285) indicate, the teaching capacity

according to the Word of God is a key element that establishes the basis for the elder's doctrinal function as teacher and apologist of the gospel. Out of the devotion to the trustworthy Word they both edify others in this trustworthy Word and rebuke those who oppose it. If one strives to be a master apologist and teacher, one must be mastered by the Word of God.

With the above mentioned as foundational framework, it is essential to focus on what is meant by "refute". Regarding to the word "to refute" (ἐλέγχειν) in verse 9, Mounce (2000:392) states that it denotes a strong rebuttal. This corresponds with verse 13 where it is commanded that those who oppose the truth should not just be rebuked but also that they should be rebuked sharply (ἔλεγε αὐτοὺς ἀποτόμως). The meaning of this word denotes the active statement that someone has done something wrong with the implication that there is sufficient evidence of this wrongdoing (Louw & Nida, 1998a:436; Büschel, 1964:474). This definition would fit well with the context as it is indicated that the elders would rebuke those who oppose the truth. The truth of the Word, to which they must hold to and teach, serves as the standard to judge whether someone is clearly teaching false doctrine or seeking to deceive people.

Titus 1:10-16 provides the reason for why an elder should be able to refute those who oppose the truth. It is here where the true nature of the false teachers is made evident. In verse 10 it seems that there were at least a significant number of false teachers, and they are as insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers. Griffin & Lea (1992:289) indicate what Paul is utilizing in verse 12 is a quote from Epimenides, a well-known 6th century BC Cretan philosopher. Paul uses this depiction of Cretan character to further accentuate the depraved character of these false teachers. Furthermore, there is also a reference made to circumcision, most likely Judaizers, which is part of the various false teachers. The severity of this false teaching is so prevalent that it is stated in verse 11 that they ought to be silenced. Louw & Nida (1988a:403) explain that this word (silenced) means to cause someone to stop talking completely. Verse 11 goes on to explain the urgency by providing the reason why these false teachers need to be silenced. These false teachers need to be silenced completely because they are causing conflict within families in the church by teaching what they ought not to teach, and that for unjust gain. The use of these strong words by Paul is clearly justified when considering the severe situation within the churches. This should provide further credence for the great responsibility and duty that elders have in protecting the church from error through teaching sound doctrine and defending the faith.

Titus 1:5-16 and especially the command in Titus 1:9 is indeed crucial to grasp, as it clearly explains what is expected from those who are leaders within the church. If they do not reflect these key elements, they do not qualify for taking the great responsibility of being elders in the churches. One of these essentials is that elders are able to argue as part of their apologetic

commission. To teach and preach the truth of the Gospel to others is only half of the mandate. As the aforementioned goal of apologetics indicates, elders, as good shepherds of the flock (Acts 20), should also partake in defending the truth. They ought to refute, with thorough argumentation, those who oppose it by seeking to corrupt and spread false teaching.

The refutation of heresies in Crete resonates with that of Jesus' warning of false teachers in Matthew 7:15. The false teachers come as wolves in sheep's clothing in order to deceive the flock. This has been a reality for Christianity for centuries when viewing multitude of heresies¹⁰ that seek to pervert the truth of the Gospel. This passage also exemplifies a key aspect of apologetics namely that elders should not merely refute the erroneous individual to win an argument, but (as is seen in verse 13) should lead the said individual and his followers in restoration of sound faith and the truth of the sound doctrine.

2.4 Matthew 22:15-45: The example

When viewing the case for Christian apologetics and the importance of refutation and argumentation, it is essential to learn from the founder of the Christian faith, Jesus Christ.

“Jesus had demonstrated the truth of his message and his identity over and over again using nearly every method at his disposal, including miracle, prophecy, and godly style of life, authoritative teaching and reasoned argumentation” (Hazen, 2004:39).

Matthew 22:15-45 is one of the clearest examples of the way Jesus engages in debate and reasoning with those around Him. Jesus not only responds to the questions and objections that are presented to Him, but also challenges the beliefs of those who are listening. This section contains four cases of questions in which three are posed to Jesus, and one by Jesus (France, 2007:828; Nolland, 2005:893). Starting in Matthew 21:23-46, we see Jesus in the temple courts teaching through parables in the presence of both ordinary people and religious leaders.

According to Matthew 21:45-46, the chief priests and Pharisees knew that Jesus was speaking about their false leadership in his parables, and they were seeking a way to arrest Him. However, they feared the crowd as the people saw Jesus as a prophet of God. Furthermore, the trap that the religious leaders set to refute Jesus provides an opportunity for Jesus to communicate God's claim on the whole person, i.e., heart, soul and mind (Nolland, 2005:893-894).

¹⁰ Cairns (1996:127) provides a useful chart which illustrates the major theological issues with which heretical groups opposed the early church. The early church defended orthodox Christian teaching and this clash with heretical teaching led to the calling of the major church councils in which orthodox teachings was expressed in formalized creeds to clearly distinguish the orthodox Christian faith with that of the heretics. The major and well known controversies include that of the Arianism which led to the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. Another major struggle was with Nestorianism which was officially denied in the council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D.

In the following section in Matthew 22, Jesus' interactions in the temple court continue. In this section Jesus directly engages the Jewish religious and political leaders, namely the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Herodians.

2.4.1 Jesus refutes the Pharisees (verse 15-22)

In this passage the Pharisees and the Herodians join forces to trap Jesus with his own words by asking him a difficult question about the paying of taxes to the Roman Empire.¹¹ With this question they wanted to put Jesus in a dilemma which would force him to side with either one side or the other. Whichever choice Jesus would make would have dire consequences, as he would be labelled a pro-Roman collaborator or a zealous Jewish insurrectionist (Noland, 2005:897). Keener (1999: 524) states that by choosing to support taxes to Rome, Jesus would be undercutting his popular messianic support among the people of Roman occupied Palestine. Furthermore, as France (2007:830) indicates, many of the ordinary Jews, in Jerusalem in particular, had sympathy for "Zealot" ideology for they were extremely patriotic and had a deep resentment for Roman rule. However, by challenging taxes to Rome, the Herodians may accuse Him of being a revolutionary, and he would be quickly executed by the Romans.¹²

Keener (1999:524) states that together these groups approached Jesus with the sort of complimentary words with which a rhetorician might seek an audience's favour, but with the aim of lowering Jesus' guard as seen in verse 16. However, in verse 18 it is clear that Jesus could recognize their flattery and expose their evil intentions, and rightly attributes the title of hypocrites to them.

Regarding Jesus' answer to their question, Blomberg (1992:331) indicates that Jesus' response was astonishing to everyone. Jesus dissolved the *false dilemma*¹³ presented to Him by affirming to what both the Pharisees and the Herodians had held dear. Keener (1999:525) explains that Jesus' reference to Caesar, rendering to Caesar to what belongs to Caesar it means that since the coin bears the emperor's inscription and face it was to be given back to him. It was Caesar's

¹¹ Blomberg (1992:330) and Nolland (2005:896) indicate that the Pharisees, and many Jews in general, resented having to pay taxes for Rome, for they had seen it as an infringement of Jewish law. Not to mention the fact that there was a gentile empire ruling over them. On the other hand, the Herodians who were a small group of Jews from Herod's family, were loyal to the Roman Empire and saw taxes as the appropriate way in being good citizens toward the occupying power (Hagner, 1995:635). When viewing these two groups, who diametrically opposed one another, join forces to capture Jesus is just comes to show how big of a threat Jesus' teaching was.

¹² France (2007:829) indicates what made this question all the more controversial was the previous revolt led against Rome in A.D. 6 by a man named Judas who was a Galilean like Jesus. The cause of the revolt was Rome's implementation of taxes after conquering the region.

¹³ Beckwith & Parrish (1997:47) indicate that a false dilemma is a form of logical fallacy; only two options are presented in an argument, but a third alternative solving the dilemma is available. It may also manifest when two options in an argument are presented as contrary or contradictory, when they are in reality quite compatible with one another.

property therefore return it unto the empire. There is an acknowledgement of the legitimacy and role of human government.¹⁴

As for the second part of the answer, to render to God what is God's, is to acknowledge God's ultimate sovereignty and to worship Him alone. If it is true that some money should go to Caesar, then it is even more true that the entirety of one's being and existence, as a creature made by God in his image, needs to be given to God (Hagner, 1995: 636; Nolland, 2005:899; Rom. 12:1). When what God says comes into conflict with what the human government advocates, God's will always take priority. Jesus resolved this dilemma by making this distinction between the legitimacy of human government and allegiance to God's ultimate authority. The resulting factor of Jesus' response left them amazed - so they left.

Regarding the importance of logical argumentation, it is shown that one must be aware of the opponent's logical manoeuvres during the conversation. When engaging in apologetic dialogue and argumentation, it is easy to get stuck in a false dilemma, and then be distracted from the main point. Here the opponent tries to shift the focus of the discussion and force one to a certain conclusion. However, Jesus was taking note of what both parties believed; how they asked their question, and then provided a third possibility. The argument by the Pharisees and Herodians is not only deconstructed, but Jesus provided an alternative approach to the issue.

2.4.2 Jesus refutes the Sadducees (verse 23-33)

In this passage, the Sadducees seek to challenge Jesus. France (2007:836) states that as the previous question was politically loaded, this one was more theologically loaded containing issues that divided the Jews. They pose a hypothetical scenario to Jesus which is intended as a *reductio ad absurdum*¹⁵ of the resurrection (Willard, 1999:609). A man marries a woman but dies before they have children. According to Deuteronomy 25:5,¹⁶ a husband's brother should marry the widow once the husband is deceased. The brother would then carry the name of his deceased brother by producing more children. The Sadducees create a scenario: seven brothers marry a woman, one after the other after the death of the previous brother. However, each time a brother dies before they can produce children. On the basis of this scenario, the Sadducees challenge Jesus by asking him who the woman would be married to in the afterlife.¹⁷ The question is posed

¹⁴ Rom. 13:1-17; 1 Pet. 2:13-17.

¹⁵ According to Kreeft (2014:294) this is both an effective and common form of argument. What this argument aims at demonstrating is, given that the opponent's idea were true, absurd consequences would logically follow.

¹⁶ See also Genesis 38:8; Ruth 3:9-4:10.

¹⁷ Nolland (2005:904) and Hagner (1995:641) point out the hidden assumption that the Sadducees had of the concept of resurrection, which they did not believe in, that in their view the resurrection would denote a strong continuity of the arrangements of life in the present.

to Jesus in an attempt to demonstrate that belief in the resurrection leads toward an absurd conclusion.

Groothuis (2011:32) indicates that the argument of the Sadducees in this instance is brilliant. They know that Jesus reveres the Law of Moses, as they themselves do, but also believes in the resurrection, which they don't.¹⁸ Through the argument of *reductio ad absurdum* the Sadducees attempt to force Jesus into a logical dilemma by stating that these two aspects are in contradiction and they cannot both be true.

Carter and Coleman (2009:58) illustrate the argument of the Sadducees as follows:

Premise 1: *If we believe the Torah's teaching on Levirate marriage, then we have to deny the doctrine of the resurrection.*

Premise 2: *The Torah's teaching on Levirate marriage is unquestionable.*

Conclusion: *Therefore, the doctrine of the resurrection must be denied.*

Kreeft (2014:294) indicates that one of the only effective ways to escape this form of argument is to deny one of the claims or propositions being made; derailing the entire argument.

Jesus' response¹⁹ shows that the Sadducees are in error because they, in verse 29, "do not know the Scriptures or the power of God." Kreeft (2014:294) indicates that the only way to call the *reduction ad absurdum* to question is by demonstrating that the idea necessarily leads to an absurd conclusion. This is exactly how Jesus responds when he proceeds to explain to the Sadducees why his view is not the absurd, but rather that they are in error. They commit two errors in this instance (Hagner, 1995:641) – a theological and a biblical error. The theological error is shown by their lack of knowledge of the power of God. It follows the assumption that God, who is the author of life, cannot raise the dead. The biblical error in this instance, which shows they do not know the Scriptures, is that they assume that their scriptural authority, the Torah, speaks nothing about the resurrection (Groothuis, 2002:47). However, Jesus is about to show the Sadducees from their own scriptural authority, which is the *Torah*, that the doctrine of resurrection is indeed a true doctrine.

¹⁸ Matthew 22:23; Mark 12:18; Acts 23:7-8

¹⁹ If Jesus was the type of close-minded religious figure that many sceptics make Him to be, then there would be a myriad of different ways in which He could have responded. He could have dodged the question with a pious or unrelated utterance, threaten those who dare question His authority with hell or even accept the logical contradiction and have no qualm with it (Groothuis, 2002:48). However, Jesus doesn't do any of this but proceeded to methodically deconstruct their argument with logical precision.

Groothuis (2011:32) states that Jesus first challenges their assumption that life on temporal earth will be like that in the afterlife. Jesus indicates in verse 31 that people will not marry or be given in marriage, but will be like the angels in heaven. By doing this, Jesus effectively resolves the false dilemma by showing an alternative to the original dilemma; that there is no marriage in the resurrected life.

Jesus then proceeds to challenge the Sadducees on their underlying and more pressing problem, namely the resurrection.²⁰ Jesus quotes from Exodus 3:6, which is peculiar, for there are many other verses in the Old Testament Jesus could have referred to, like Daniel 12:2, Psalm 16:9-11 or Job 19:25-27 (Groothuis, 2002:48). However, this is an excellent reference, as France (2007:836) and Hagner (1995:640) indicate, because the Sadducees saw the *Torah* as their supreme authority. Jesus, aware of their dismissal of other parts of the Old Testament, refers to Exodus 3:6 to posit evidence for the resurrection from their supreme authority. This would illustrate an important aspect when conversing with people to establish common ground. The establishing of common ground²¹ in debate and conversation is a key aspect of apologetics and evangelism.

Exodus 3:6 refers to God's appearance to Moses, revealing His identity. He is the same God of his forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The point that Jesus is making might seem a bit ambiguous at first. France (2007:840-841) indicates that the argument that Jesus is making here may be understood in two senses, though they still make the same point either way. The first being in the statement "I am". This would mean that at the time when God spoke to Moses, hundreds of years after Abraham, Isaac and Jacob died, He is, in the sense of the present tense, still their God – which implies that they are still alive (Hagner 1995:642; Groothuis, 2002:48).

The second sense in which this may be understood is in terms of the covenant that God had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Their temporal death would not nullify the greatest covenantal reality – that man is in full relation to God, and God would not be still representing Himself as their God if He was just finished with them and abandoned them to the grave(Nolland,

²⁰ The physical and literal resurrection of Jesus Christ can be depicted as being the centrepiece of Christianity. Without Jesus' literal resurrection from the dead Christianity is shown to be false and there is no saving faith. This great importance of this event is clearly depicted by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:17 "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."

²¹ Even when engaging with someone who may possess beliefs diametrically opposed to one's own, there is always an aspect of common ground; both opponents may come together and converse (Geisler, 2016:12). All human beings regardless of what they believe share a common human nature and existence, therefore there will always be some aspect of common ground. For example, Christians and Atheists have beliefs that are greatly different from one another. Nonetheless, a point that they may agree on is that the universe came into existence. As to the question on God's existence, there is no intermediate answer, either God exists or He does not. Another example is religious pluralism: even though the central tenants of each religion are mutually exclusive and cannot all be true, a Christian may still agree with a pluralist. There are some aspects like common morality that are evident amongst most religions by virtue of the law being written on the hearts of all humans (Romans 2:14-15).

2005:906).²² Those with whom the living God identifies in relation to Himself cannot be truly dead, but are alive, even if they die within temporal reality. Jesus accentuates this second reference by His statement that God is not the God of the dead but of the living.

The resulting factor of this engagement in verse 33 and 34 is that the people were astonished at Jesus' teaching and that He silenced the Sadducees. Jesus had addressed the key hidden premise in their argumentation being their view on marriage and the afterlife and duly refuted their argument. However, the main subject in this instance was an issue with the resurrection – which Jesus identified as the real underlying problem. This is essential, for apologetic dialogue and argumentation can be distracted from addressing the real issue.²³ Therefore, attention to hidden premises and presuppositions within the opponent's view is crucial in order to move the discussion to where it really matters, which in this case, was the resurrection.

It is also important to note that Jesus appealed to the common ground. Appealing to common ground entails using sources and authorities that both sides of the discussion utilize. From this basis one can argue for one's own conclusion as opposed to the opponent's. However, because there is an appeal to commonly held sources, the opponent is forced, if they wish to be intellectually consistent, follow the argument to its logical conclusion.

2.4.3 Pharisees question Jesus on the greatest commandment (verse 34-40)

Jesus now deals with the Sadducees – in fact – it is indicated that he had silenced them. After Jesus had dealt with the Sadducees, the Pharisees returned to Jesus. This time they had an expert of the law to test Him; asking Jesus which of the commandments was the greatest.²⁴ Keener (1999:530) points out that in their 'testing' of Jesus, the intent was not to gain deeper knowledge about the Torah, but they came with malicious intent. However, the parallel account in Mark 12:28-34 suggests that this teacher of the law had heard Jesus debating with the Sadducees. Impressed with the answer that Jesus gave the Sadducees, this teacher approached Jesus with an honest question to see what Jesus would say.

Blomberg (1992:335) mentions that on this point Jesus' audience may have agreed with Him. This explains the omission of an objection to what Jesus said. Quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 – to love God with your whole being and to love your neighbour as yourself,

²² This is a key theological and apologetic aspect within Christianity. There is assurance and hope within God's promise in His covenant. It not only establishes the assurance of salvation, but also the reality and hope of the future resurrection into eternal life – being fully united with God.

²³ This is in fact a type of procedural fallacy known as ignoring the argument or is its popular term a "red herring" which entails the arguer diverting the argument to some other different or irrelevant issue (Moreland 1997:123; Kreeft, 2014:106).

²⁴ Keener (1999: 530-531) points out that the reason that this particular question might be controversial is because it was a theological issue with much debate amongst the Jews on which law is the greatest.

Jesus mandates that the rest of the law flows from these commands. The two commandments are inextricably linked, as the first leads to the second, and the second presupposes the first; they cover the vertical dimension with God and the horizontal dimension with fellow humans. Hagner (1995:648) notes that there is also a distinction in the way love is expressed in each dimension. In the horizontal dimension, love is expressed to others because of the inherent worth they possess, therefore one seeks their good and well-being. In the vertical dimension, love of God is understood as reverence, commitment, and obedience. All this is the famous Golden rule. When Jesus names the aspects of human existence with which we are to love God it encompasses every single aspect of our human nature (Nolland, 2005:911).

Particular attention needs to be given, for insight in apologetic argumentation, when Jesus also includes the intellectual love of God with the mind.²⁵ In fact, Moreland (1997:50) states that Jesus had already given an example to his disciples of loving God with the mind. This would refer to Jesus' intellectual responses to both the Pharisees and the Sadducees as discussed above.

2.4.4 Jesus asks a question (verse 41-46)

In this entire discourse Jesus has masterfully dealt with the questions and objections raised by different people and groups. He listened to them, answered them, and when necessary, challenged them on the various false assumptions they held. Jesus exemplifies what it means to engage in apologetics.

However, this is not all that can be learned from Jesus' conduct in this section. He also turns the tables and proceeds not only to defend the truth in the way He answers questions, be they with malicious or honest intent, but also takes initiative to confront the Pharisees with a question of His own concerning the identity of, and their refusal of recognizing Him, as the Messiah. This is the real issue they should be discussing (Blomberg, 1992:336). This displays another key aspect when engaging in apologetics which does not only entail answering questions, but taking initiative in questions, and challenging others as part of reaching the truth.

Jesus involves the audience by asking them on their thoughts on the Christ or Messiah. To his question "whose son is he?" they reply that the Messiah is the son of David.²⁶ It is important to keep in mind (as Turner, 2008:540 points out) that the Pharisees' view of the Messiah, as a descendant of David, was more nationalistic/militaristic as they sought for a powerful leader to free them from Roman rule. It is in this light that Jesus challenges them by referring to Psalm

²⁵ Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30 & Luke 10:27

²⁶ Hagner (1995:650) indicates that this was an easy question for the Pharisees to answer for it was common knowledge that the promised Messiah would be of the lineage of David (as seen in passage like 2 Samuel 7:12-13, Psalm 89:4 & Jeremiah 23:5).

110:1 in which David calls the Messiah Lord. Jesus then asks the question: "If then David calls him Lord. How can he be his son?"²⁷

Through His question, Jesus poses a logical problem to the Pharisees that cannot be solved within their vision of an earthly messiah. The problem it presents for the Pharisees is, how can the Messiah be David's Lord yet at the same time David's son? By Jewish standards of familial respect, it is rather the son who refers to his father as "my lord" (Hagner, 1995:651; Keener, 1999: 532). Turner (2008:540) adds to this by asking the key question: How could a mere son of David also be his Lord at the same time? Clearly, the Messiah is the one who possesses more honour and authority than the powerful king of Israel himself.

France (2007:848-849) makes an acute observation on how Jesus phrases the question. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, the title "Son of David" is used, and especially in Matthew 15:22 and 21:9 it is directly attributed, to Jesus. Jesus is not denying this claim but He is taking it further by illustrating that He is not only the special messianic figure from David's lineage, but He is more than that, namely the manifestation of the presence of God, the Son of God (Hagner, 1995:651; Willard, 1999:609-610). Furthermore, in 21:37 Jesus already implicitly demonstrated that He is the Son of God – and that is the claim that Jesus wishes to draw out from his audience.

If David calls this figure, who is David's son, "Lord" then it is clear that He is also the son of someone far superior to David, the King of Israel.²⁸ Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that such a one, who is under God yet superior to David, is the Messiah.

The argument that Jesus makes may be presented as follows²⁹

Premise 1: *If the Messiah is merely the human descendent of David, David could not have called him "Lord."*

Premise 2: *David did call the Christ "Lord" in Psalm 110:1.*

Conclusion: *Therefore, the Messiah is not merely the human descendent of David but also divine Lord.*

There is a dual consequence to Jesus' apologetic approach. Firstly, it strengthens His followers and provides deeper insight into His being. Secondly, it silences His opponents. Turner (2008:542) states that the silence of the Jewish leaders shows that they have abandoned their

²⁷ The apostles understood and utilized Psalm 110 as a demonstration that Jesus is both divine Lord and Messiah as seen in Acts 2:33-36, 1 Corinthians 15:25, Ephesians 1:20, Colossians 3:1 Hebrews 1:3, 1:13; 5:6, 8:1, 10:13 & 12:2. Jesus Himself also alluded again to this passage in Matthew 26:64.

²⁸ Jesus is in both senses the son of David and the Lord. This is the reality of the Incarnation. As completely human Jesus is descended from the line of David while He is completely God being the person of the Son in the Trinity.

²⁹ The form of this argument has been drawn from similar one as presented by Groothuis (2002:51).

plot of trying to refute Jesus in public. Furthermore, Jesus' defence was effective to the extent that no one else dared to ask him any more questions.

Matthew 22 illustrates clearly that Jesus is the example of apologetic discourse. Moreland (1997:51) lists multiple key aspects which Christians can learn from Jesus which are essential to argumentation and persuasion. However, there are also additional key elements present in this text.

1. Jesus had shown familiarity with his opponents' views. This is a fundamental aspect of apologetic dialogue, evangelism and basic discourse in general. Having some knowledge of what one's opponent believes would greatly avoid misunderstanding and also better help articulate one's own differing position.
2. Jesus was appealing to common ground – texts which He and his opponents both accepted.
3. Jesus utilized the laws of logic to deconstruct his opponents' arguments and refute them effectively. This shows that knowledge and practice of logic is an essential factor for apologetics and evangelism. Opposing arguments, like obstacles, may be swept away to make way for the presentation of the gospel.
4. Jesus made a well-constructed positive argument to his opponents. This principle connects with the previous on the importance of logic as it shows that even in the presenting of the Gospel in a positive argument, logic is still essential.
5. Jesus set a visible example of what it means to love God with your mind.

Additional principles that may derived include the following:

1. Jesus was sensitive to the context in which he was speaking. In his dialogue with the Pharisees and the Herodians, Jesus was mindful of how he would answer their questions. The wrong answer could have dire ramifications in this politically charged context.
2. Jesus knew how to specifically address each of his various audience members. When dealing with the sceptical Sadducees, Jesus answered their argument and focused on their beliefs about the resurrection. When dealing with the expert in the law, Jesus answered his honest questions, and even commended him for seeing an essential truth.

A major component of Jesus' mission was to teach and defend the truth. In doing so He presented Himself as being an excellent logician and master apologist who utilized logic to demolish arguments and point out error (Geisler & Zukeran; 2009:66; Willard, 1999:606). Hazen (2004:39) points out that Jesus did not write apologetic tracts or treaties, but exemplified its essential nature

through the way in which he engaged people. Jesus is shown also to be a master of the Scriptures from which He both refuted and challenged the religious leaders. Jesus engages in discussion, debate, and argumentation in order to bring people to the truth. Thus, He is an example to His followers.

It is clear from a study of Matthew 22 that the use of logical argumentation and persuasion is central for any Christian when engaging in apologetic dialogue with non-Christians. Not only is the concept demonstrated as being important, there is a clear and basic guideline set through Jesus' example for Christians wishing to engage in effective apologetic dialogue.

2.5 Guidelines for effective argumentation

By viewing the command to the elders by Paul in Titus 1, the mandate and the nature of effective argumentation can be clearly inferred. Those who oppose and espouse arguments against the truth need to be engaged with and refuted. In addition to an explicit command, there is a clear example of this act given by Jesus Christ in Matthew 22. It is from here that the principles for apologetic dialogue can be organized into a basic set of guidelines in order to assist Christians in apologetic dialogue and evangelism.

It must be noted that the following guidelines serve only as general principles that may serve to assist Christians in Christian apologetic dialogue. These guidelines are by no means a supreme methodology³⁰ which yields certitude in every single instance of application.

2.5.1 Christian character in apologetic dialogue

A key principle in Christian apologetics is the character in which one approaches it.³¹ The passages above clearly display the importance of having strong and persuasive logical arguments and responses. However, this is not the way an apologetic endeavour necessarily plays out. For it is true that one could provide a sound and persuasive argument, but without the appropriate conduct it can be done in an arrogant, dismissive, and unchristian manner. There have been many Christians who have approached apologetics incorrectly and have done grievous damage

³⁰ In fact, there is no such a one size fits all approach when it comes to methodology in apologetics. No method will surely fit everyone because every single person is different, has different issues and challenges and are set within different contexts. We need to be reminded that Jesus Himself never spoke to all people in the same way. Therefore, neither should Christians do so as well. We are to approach each conversation in a contextual manner that suits that person's unique circumstance (Guinness, 2015:33).

³¹ It is not without reason that in 1 Peter 3:15-16 which contains the apologetic mandate there is also an antecedent and consequential mandate. The antecedent mandate is to sanctify Jesus Christ as Lord of the heart. This is the focus of the apologetic endeavor, which is to represent serve Christ and build His kingdom. The consequential mandate indicates that apologetics should be done with gentleness and respect and with a good conscience so that despite various accusations Christians will not be found guilty of any form of hypocrisy or moral misconduct.

to the testimony of the Gospel³² (Geisler, 2016:3). Engaging in Christian apologetics does not endorse recklessly blasting away at a person's beliefs in trying to "win the argument". Ironically, this does not even make the other person more open to hear what one has to say, but only makes them more defensive and closed to the truth of the Gospel.³³ That is why the essence of the apologetic approach is understood as being done with a Christ-centred character which includes a Christian's faithfulness to Jesus Christ in word, deed, and purpose (1 Pet 3:15).

The following definition of apologetics by Beilby (2011:31) captures the essential nature of what Christian apologetics entails:

"Christian apologetics is the task of defending and commending the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ in a Christ-like, context-sensitive and audience specific manner."

2.5.2 The anatomy of unbelief

When engaging in apologetic dialogue with someone, a good starting point would be to determine the specific nature of their unbelief. As seen in the above definition of apologetics, one needs to be context-sensitive and audience-specific. There may be specific barriers that a person may have towards belief in Christianity. These barriers may be intellectual (for instance, Christianity is not rationally persuasive); emotional (for instance, there is emotional trauma and distrust associated with Christianity) and spiritual (for instance, refusing to enact any serious moral changes in one's life (Beilby, 2011:171-172; McGrath, 2012:17)).

These various barriers are only supplemental towards the unbelief and are not the essence of unbelief itself. Christianity affirms that the seat of unbelief lies in the corrupted will of humanity and its refusal to submit unto the will of God as a result of the fall of humanity, described in Genesis 3.³⁴ Beilby (2011:167) reminds Christians that truth is essential and apologetics entails defending and commending the truth of Christianity, but Christianity does not exist solely as an abstract set of true beliefs. In fact, Christianity is a way of being, living, acting, and doing. In James 2:19 this relationship between intellectual assent, submission and commitment of the will is clearly demonstrated. James points out that the people acknowledge the truth that God is one, which is good, however, even the demons themselves believe this yet they are in rebellion against God. Therefore, possessing mere intellectual assent to demonstrated and rationally justified truths

³² Kreeft (2014:108-109) categorizes this as a procedural fallacy which is to seemingly win the argument but lose one's opponent due to being inconsiderate to them. In fact, the same accounts vice versa, in that one may seek to be considerate to the other person but at the expense of constructing a compelling and rationally sound argument.

³³ In this instance it would also be good to take to heart the wisdom in Proverbs 18:19 "A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city, and quarreling is like the bars of a castle."

³⁴ Other passages in the Bible speaks in detail on the nature of the unbelieving will of humanity: Exodus 3:19, Job 21:14-15, Jeremiah 17:9, Ezekiel 28:2, Luke 7:28-30, John 5:39-44, Acts 7:51-53, Romans 1:18, Romans 3:23 and Romans 11:23 are some examples.

does not entail Christian faith (Beilby, 2011:169; McGrath, 2012:24). Rather, it entails the submission and commitment of the will to God's will which is the gift of faith through the Holy Spirit.³⁵

The question may be raised that if this is the nature of unbelief, then what use is it to engage in argument, persuasion, and apologetic dialogue?

Unbelief should not dissuade Christians from constructively engaging with people. The reality today is that there are many people who do not wish to believe or even hear what one has to say. However, that is the challenge of persuasion. It is to help them see and keep them accountable to the truth that has been presented so that they are without excuse (Guinness, 2015:27). Whether the unbelieving nature of their will is changed, is a matter of the Holy Spirit. However, the Spirit uses the apologetic discourse to remove the various barriers/excuses which seek to suppress the truth and justify unbelief and seeks to keep people to task by commending the truth of Christianity.

2.5.3 Logical argumentation

In Titus 1 it is stated that those who oppose the truth need to be refuted and with Jesus' example it is seen how one may do so. Being able to partake in effective logical argumentation, presupposes that one is familiar with the basic rules of argumentation.³⁶ It is not enough for Christians to have accurately informed minds, but they should also be wise³⁷ and require artful methods. This consists in asking the right questions and being mindful of the rules of sound argumentation (Koukl, 2004:55). At this juncture it is essential to lay out some of the basic principles of logic that may serve as a guideline to those engaged in apologetic dialogue. This may be clarified in the definition that Geisler and Brooks (1990:12) provide regarding logic:

Logic is the study of right reason or valid inferences and the attending fallacies, formal and informal.

In a general sense, logic denotes the study of correct reasoning, and in a more particular sense, it denotes discerning between good arguments and bad arguments in a logical manner i.e. through the basic rules of logic (McGlothlin, 2017:2).

³⁵ Deuteronomy 30:6, Romans 2:29 & Ephesians 2:8.

³⁶ When discussing apologetics in the New Testament, Stoker (2017:43) came to the following conclusion: "The focus of apologetics, accordingly, is to give a reasoned response to the attacks of opponents, as well as to answer the probing questions of those who wonder about the gospel and aspects thereof."

³⁷ Matthew 10:16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves."

This definition may be expanded even further when there is reference to the model of the three acts of the mind namely: apprehension, judgement and reasoning. Each respective act is logically expressed in terms, propositions, and arguments. The end of each respective act is to reach clarity, truth, and rational validity. Each respective act of the mind has failed when the terms are unclear/ambiguous, when the propositions are false, and when there is a formal logical fallacy in the reasoning. All three of these acts should be in unison with one another and are key for obtaining a sound argument. Only when the criteria for all three acts have been met; the terms are clear, the propositions are true, and the reasoning is valid, the conclusion which necessarily follows from the premises is undeniably true (Beckwith & Parrish, 1997:27; Kreeft, 2014:32-33; Sullivan, 2005: 4-6).

Utilizing the three acts of the mind, one may draw on a good framework for evaluating arguments. How Jesus engages with his opponents provides us with good examples of how to engage in logical argumentation when in apologetic dialogue. This does not just entail the deconstruction of other's arguments but also the construction of one's own sound arguments. Part of effective apologetic dialogue is also asking the right questions. This would entail asking thought-provoking questions that create an active desire in others to seek the truth with regards to the questions and issues that one has raised (Geisler, 2016:7). In asking the right questions one may also come to find the specific barrier to faith, for not all barriers are intellectual per se, but may be emotional, moral or spiritual. Therefore, it is imperative that when engaged in apologetic discourse, one must pay attention to what a person is saying and listen carefully to what their issue may be. When the problem has been ascertained one may adjust the approach to the conversation accordingly.

In the first act of the mind, clear definitions of terms are fundamental. The goal here is to provide good definitions of key terms that are used in the dialogue. The key question to ask is: "What do you mean by that?" Koukl (2004:50) provides several reasons stating that clarification questions are key to effective communication. Firstly, by asking clarifying questions, a setting for interactive dialogue between the various parties is created. Secondly, asking questions shows that one is genuinely interested and truly seeks to understand their view. Thirdly, by asking the other party to clarify what they believe and what are trying to convey, it enables the other party to think thoroughly through the particular belief that they hold. Lastly, by asking clarifying questions one not only gains important information, but it also helps in avoiding any instance of frustration that might arise from miscommunication or misrepresentation by either parties. In Jesus' exchange with the Sadducees, it is clear that they had a misconception on the nature of the resurrection thinking that one will still be married. However, Jesus clarified the nature of the resurrection; there is no marriage.

In the second act of the mind, one deals with propositions. A proposition is a declarative sentence made, which consists of a subject and predicate. Such a sentence states that something is either true or false (Sullivan, 2005:69). The goal here is to determine whether the declarative sentences that are present in the argument are actually true or false. The key question to ask is: “Is that true?”³⁸ This will greatly assist both parties in the conversation to support what they are stating is true. Many times people may hold to a particular claim without having tested or thought it through. In many instances people may just make assumptions and exclamatory statements without showing whether the particular claim is true, it is just assumed to be true (Kreeft, 2014:99). The more credible support provided for a premise, the stronger its truth claim will be.

There are two ways in which the truth of a premise, which would also include the argument overall, may be strengthened (Moreland and Craig, 2003:58-59; McGrew, 2016:131). The first is that the premises are to be widely accessible to any rational inquirers to such an extent that it would demand the eventual conclusion possesses a non-negligible probability.³⁹ The second is that the plausibility of each premise is greater than that of its negation; shifting the ratio of probabilities in favour of the conclusion of the argument. In Jesus’ exchange with the Sadducees, He not only pointed out their misunderstanding of the term ‘resurrection’ – but made it clear that their claims were wrong i.e. false.⁴⁰ Jesus also provides a reason for their false premise – the Sadducees’ did not understand the Scriptures nor the power of God. This raises two challenges to the Sadducees’ view. The first is a theological challenge, which asks: is it really impossible for God, who is the author of life, to raise the dead? The second challenge is a biblical one which brings into question the scriptural justification for the Sadducees’ view. As already demonstrated in the first section of this article, Jesus corrected this false premise by appealing to scriptural authority which they accepted.

In the third act of the mind, the analysis of the structures of arguments are key. McGlothlin (2017:2) states that arguments refer to logical relationships of supporting claims (i.e. premises) and the supported claim (i.e. conclusion). The goal here is to establish a valid logical relationship between propositions/premises and the conclusion which must necessarily follow from them. This forces the other party to provide a rational account of their own views/beliefs (Koukl, 2004:51; Geisler, 2016:16). Furthermore, this would also focus the burden of proof properly on the one that

³⁸ It is essential to note that what is meant by truth: that which corresponds to reality i.e. the correspondence of the mind with reality (Sullivan, 2005:70; Kreeft, 2014:145). A more basic way of conveying what truth: “telling it like it really is.”

³⁹ McGrew (2016:131) states that it may not even need to exceed 50% for even if its lowest possible probability is 10% then it would already make people consider the slight possibility that it might be worth hearing. It must also be taken into consideration that this is only one aspect of the argument, when building the argument and also further supplementing a cumulative case with more arguments and evidence, this probability will greatly increase.

⁴⁰ Matthew 22:29, Mark 12:24.

is making the claim.⁴¹ It is at this point that it is essential to note that one does not need to refute each and every claim made by one's opponent. Rather the burden of proof is upon them to defend and provide rational justification of their own claim.

The key question to ask in the third act of the mind is: "How does that follow?" or "How did you come to that conclusion?" or "What are your reasons for saying that?". Regarding the exchange that Jesus had with the religious leaders – Jesus had successfully comprehended and understood their reasons for their arguments and then proceeded to dismantle them accordingly. However, not only did Jesus refute them, but He presented an argument to them and they were unable to respond to Him.

The principles of logic are universal, this is key – these principles are binding and used in everyday life by everyone (Beckwith & Parrish, 1997:32; Moreland & Craig, 2003:28). There is not Eastern vs. Western logic, for one would need to utilize the principles of logic beforehand even to make such a distinction. Furthermore, one cannot deny the truth of logical principles. In order to deny them one would need to use them. The existence of the logical principles are necessary aspects of reality and are therefore known as first principles.

"... the laws of logic have a special standing; they are topic-neutral conditions for rational thought, and they are not negotiable." (McGrew, 2016:125)

This establishes a sure common ground when conversing with others as both parties are conformed to the same rules and also both parties utilize them. According to Willard (1999:606) an important aspect of mastering logic is the will to be logical i.e. to consciously cultivate a virtuous character in step with being logical. This would necessitate to strive for qualities like freedom from distraction, actual focus on meanings and ideas expressed in the conversation, as well as a devotion to seek the truth wherever it may lead (Willard, 1999:606).

Following and consistently practicing these three acts of the mind will greatly assist the believer in navigating apologetic discourse effectively. There are also a few additional guidelines that may further serve to assist the Christian in apologetic discourse. Koukl (2004:54) notes that after one has comprehension of what the other party means by the set terms in their arguments, and also their reasons for saying so, it would lead to the next step of pointing out the flaw of the argument, if there is any. Instead of directly addressing the fault in the argument with a statement, it might

⁴¹ Kreeft (2014:108) states that this is something that both parties need to settle when in conversation. It may actually be a logical fallacy, depending on the context and the type of claim that is being made. It manifests as a fallacy when the one who needs to account for his claim does not account for it and then illicitly shifts the burden of proof to their opponent. A basic rule of order may be that whoever makes a certain claim will most certainly require to rationally justify that claim.

be better to point out this fault by asking a question, as it assists in letting the other person see the flaw in their argument for themselves. Furthermore, when presenting one's own argument, an effective way to gently introduce it is by presenting it in question format for example: "Have you ever considered.....?"

2.5.4 Apologetics and evangelism

An essential guideline, probably one of the most important guideline, is that apologetics and evangelism must never be separated when engaging in Christian evangelism and apologetic discourse. While Moreland (1997:132) emphasizes that apologetics is an absolutely essential ingredient to biblical evangelism, because an emphasis on reasoning in evangelism makes the truthfulness of the Gospel the central issue. Geisler (2016:8) would admit, while it is essential to deconstruct a person's argument or belief when engaging in apologetic discourse, the entire endeavour is rendered useless if it just solely left to that end. What people believe about God, humanity and the world maintains a central framework that governs their entire life.⁴² Once they discover that it has serious flaws and defects, it needs to be actively replaced lest they be left in disparagement and hopelessness.

Apologetics clears the way for presenting the Gospel of Jesus Christ. How apologetics functions in accord with evangelism may be expressed by borrowing imagery from the parable of the sower in Matthew 13. Apologetics serves to prepare the ground by removing all the infirmities and obstacles, then the seeds of the Gospel can be sown through evangelism. As apologetics clears the ground for faith in Christ, evangelism invites people to faith in Christ. Where apologetics seeks to attain assent, evangelism seeks to attain commitment (McGrath, 2012:22). People don't just need to be aware that their view is false, but at the same time, that Jesus is the only one true way to freedom, hope and redemption.

⁴² Ecclesiastes 3:11 "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end."

2.6 Conclusion

It is clear that logical argument and persuasion in apologetic dialogue is not only useful, but also a fundamental component in reaching those with faulty understanding and false views. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that it serves as a key Biblical principle for engaging in effective apologetic dialogue and evangelism with people from differing views.

The role of logical argumentation and persuasion is such a fundamental component, that one cannot become an elder in the church without being proficient in this task. While this is expected of leaders in the church, they should use it as an instrument in the edification of other believers for their service in God's kingdom. This is especially evident when the church needs to be defended from false teaching and erroneous doctrine. Elders, and the congregation in general, need to be armed with the basic fundamentals in logical persuasion and argumentation to both contend for and defend the faith.

When engaging in apologetic dialogue, Christians may be assured that they will always have an example to follow in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Multiple basic guidelines may be drawn from Jesus' interaction with His audience which definitely will serve to assist all Christians in the conversations that they have.

“He did not hesitate to call into account popular opinion if it was wrong. He spoke often and passionately about the value of truth and the dangers of error, and He articulated arguments to support truth and oppose error.” (Groothuis, 2002:30)

From Jesus' example one may learn the importance of logically constructing and deconstructing arguments. However, at the same time Christians have a good example of how to articulate themselves wisely, sensitively, and specifically. Essential elements like: knowing the nature of the context in which one speaks, the distinction between an argument and a honest question, the establishment of common ground, being familiar with what another person believes, and finally aiming to visibly exemplify what it means to love the Lord with all your mind.

ADDENDUM

Where the first article focusses on rational argumentation, the second article focusses on the role of evidence and rational justification of belief in effective Christian apologetic dialogue. Furthermore, the second article addresses a particular philosophical idea that stands in opposition to Christian apologetics as understood within the previous article, namely Fideism. As in the first article, two New Testament passages containing examples from Jesus and Paul, are studied from which essential principles for Christian apologetic discourse are abstracted.

Chapter 3- Article 2: The role of evidence in Christian apologetic dialogue as opposed to Fideism with reference to John 5 and Acts 26

3.1 Abstract

This is a study on selected passages from the New Testament that are analysed with the aim to establish and demonstrate the nature and importance of rational justification and evidence, which are essential within effective Christian apologetics. The potential importance of rational justification of Christian belief are be found in the examples of both Jesus and Paul. The first example focusses on John 5:1-47. Here Jesus both explains his identity to the Jews, and provides rational justification for those claims. The second example focusses on Paul in Acts 26:1-29. In this passage he makes his case for both his life and the Gospel before King Agrippa and his audience. In light of what has been examined and concluded from these passages regarding the role of rational justification, a critical evaluation of the opposing idea of Fideism is made to determine whether it is another biblically sound and rationally sufficient methodology.

3.2 Introduction

“When such is the hereditary religion handed down from generation to generation, it cannot surprise us to observe young men of sense and spirit beginning to doubt all together of the truth of the system in which they have been brought up, and ready to abandon a station which they are unable to defend. Knowing Christianity chiefly in the difficulties which it contains, and in the impossibilities which are falsely imputed to it, they all perhaps into the company of infidels; and as might be expected, they are shaken by frivolous objections and profane cavils, which, had they been grounded and bottomed in reason and argument, would have passed them “as the idle wind,” and scarcely have seemed worthy of serious note.” (Wilberforce, 2008:2)

William Wilberforce (1759-1833) details a context which would serve as a warning for generations of Christians to come, a warning that details the importance of providing rational justification for Christian belief and the consequences if this mission is ignored. In fact, Wilberforce’s description sounds quite applicable to our time. With regards to the depiction of Christian faith by sceptics within contemporary times, faith is seen as blind. Faith is without, and even contrary to reason.

This view of a deep divide between faith and reason is prevalent among many contemporary non-Christian thinkers, as can be seen in the following:

“The conflict between Christian theism and atheism is fundamentally a conflict between faith and reason. This, in epistemological terms, is the essence of the controversy. Reason and faith are opposites, two mutually exclusive terms: there is no reconciliation or common ground. Faith is belief without, or in spite of reason.” (Smith, 1979:5)

"As regards the kind of belief: it is thought virtuous to have Faith—that is to say, to have a conviction which cannot be shaken by contrary evidence. Or, if contrary evidence might induce doubt, it is held that contrary evidence must be suppressed." (Russel 1957: vi)

“Faith is the mortar that fills the cracks in the evidence and the gaps in the logic, and thus it is faith that keeps the whole terrible edifice of religious certainty still looming dangerously over our world.” (Harris, 2004:233)

The atheistic idea of a deep divide is not the only problem that must be overcome in a Christian apologetic endeavour. What is also a matter of importance, is that this concept of faith, accepting something against reason and evidence, has become more prevalent in Christian thought (Howe & Howe, 2004:23). A separation of faith and reason, religion and science, values and facts has emerged. Fideists would contend that this separation is legitimate as faith has its own sphere of

knowledge addressing issues of value, meaning and spirituality which are things towards which the realm of reason and evidence cannot contribute anything. (Tkacz, 2002:144).

Questions like these are usually asked within fideism: Is this initial concern actually in any sense warranted? Why is fideism not a legitimate option? Why should it be a concern for Christians to provide rational justification for Christianity? Doesn't the Gospel in any case sound foolish to the unbeliever?⁴³ Isn't the actual problem attempting to seek evidence and justification in the first place? Why not supplant debate and argument for testimony and proclamation?

With these questions in mind, a study of the example of Jesus in John 5 and Paul in Acts 26 will seek to determine whether there is a case for rational justification of Christian belief against the alternative approach offered by fideism.

3.3 John 5:1-47

Before analysing the specific pericope it is essential to determine the context in which this event takes place. John 5:1-15 describes the event at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem where Jesus heals the man who has been paralyzed for 38 years. After the man is healed one might expect that there should be much joy from the people in what Jesus has done. To the contrary, Jesus is interrogated by the Jews because he has seemingly violated the laws of the Sabbath.⁴⁴

The initial concern for the religious leaders was to keeping the Sabbath holy as it is God's day.⁴⁵ However, in their effort, as Morris (1971:306) states, that they've lost the true character of the Sabbath by applying a loathsome number of additional rules and regulations to the Ten Commandments and especially the fourth one about the Sabbath. In contrast Jesus was recalling people to the real meaning and intention of the Sabbath.⁴⁶ What follows from verse 16 is the confrontation that Jesus has with these Jews who seek to accuse Him of breaking the law. Geisler & Zukeran (2009:15) state, In Jesus' defence, He proceeds to provide some of the clearest and strongest teachings regarding His divine nature as the Son of God. What has started as a mere

⁴³ 1 Corinthians 1:18 "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 Corinthians 2:14 "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."

⁴⁴ Tenney (1954:106) remarks that their concern for the rules of the Sabbath rather than the sick man is evidence of their spiritual heartlessness and sterile institutionalism.

⁴⁵ Probably having in mind passages like Jeremiah 17:21-27 and Nehemiah 13:15-19, which warn against treating the Sabbath with contempt just as another day, they sought to preserve the sanctity of the Sabbath. However, laws that Jesus seemingly trespassed against are part of the oral tradition in Judaism and not exegetically based on any Old Testament passages (Köstenberger, 2004:174). Burge (2000:174) states that the oral laws of Judaism at this time had depicted a least 39 categories of things that were forbidden on the Sabbath. This prohibition of the mat carrying was then a supplemental oral law added to seemingly protect the sanctity of the Sabbath.

⁴⁶ Mark 2:27-28 - "And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

dispute of the rules of the Sabbath, is about to escalate into one of the greatest controversies in history.

3.3.1 Jesus makes His claim to divinity (verse 1-30)

In verse 19-29 Jesus proceeds to make radical claims about himself and God the Father. What Jesus states in verse 17, “*My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.*”, only serves to further escalate the situation, ultimately leading the Jews to seek his death.

Tenney (1954:106) explains that in the Gospel of John, Jesus always spoke of “my Father” and “your Father” but never “our Father”.⁴⁷ This distinction could be, that even though God is the Father of all believers, Jesus’ own relationship with the Father was radically different. However, Burge (2000:176) contends that this is only a secondary issue. The main issue here is Jesus claiming to work in the same way that the Father works.⁴⁸ Carter & Coleman (2009:51) outline the abbreviated argument that Jesus makes in this instance as follows:

Premise 1: *God the Father is working even though it is the Sabbath.*

Premise 2: *I am equal to God the Father.*

Conclusion: *Therefore, I am working even though it is the Sabbath.*

Jesus not only seemingly violated their laws of the Sabbath – in making this distinction of His particular relationship with the Father “as His own Father” – He was committing blasphemy in the eyes of the Pharisees.⁴⁹ Jesus was equating himself, in essence partaking in the same nature, to God the Father. Tenney (1954:107) states that these assertions by Jesus went far beyond the prophetic office. Formerly, no prophet has ever made themselves equal to God, for Jesus claimed

⁴⁷ Morris (1971:309) states that the phrase “My Father” was not the way the Jews unusually referred to God. If they did address Him in this way, then there was always a qualified phrase like “in heaven”. However, Jesus doesn’t do this, but sees God the Father as the closest relationship to Himself.

⁴⁸ Pointing to the eternal and continuous sustaining work of the Father, in verse 17, Jesus claims that in this same manner He is also working. Carson (1991:247) Burge (2000:176) and Calvin (1847:196-197) point to a key aspect with regards to the understanding of what Jesus predicates of himself in light of verse 17. It was commonly understood by the Jews that, even though God decreed the Sabbath a day of rest, and that He rested from His creating work (Gen. 2:2-3), He had to be continuously working in sustaining creation otherwise it would cease to exist. Therefore, God could not be charged with breaking the Sabbath law because He was continually upholding creation. Furthermore, the point is also emphasised as the very being that God is namely being infinite, omniscient, omnipotent and so on He therefore cannot subject Himself to something higher than Himself. Jesus claimed to work in this same manner therefore claiming to possess the same divine nature as God the Father. This obviously necessarily led to more hostility by the Jews as seen in verse 18.

⁴⁹ Köstenberger (2004:186) would add that for the Jews this is a violation of their strict monotheism. If Jesus was claiming to be like God, then there would be two gods and that is a clear violation of the first commandment. However, it is clear from the passage that whilst Jesus is co-eternal with the Father He is dependant and subordinate to the Father. In turn there are certain roles and functions attributed to the Son by the Father. This would demonstrate that the Son cannot take a position over against the Father as another god. There is the same essence, one God, but a distinctive difference in person and role which is the clear teaching of the doctrine of the Trinity.

the authority to duplicate and continue the works of His Father. With illustration from Tenney (1954:107) the following comparative table serves to summarize and demonstrate what Jesus is predicating of the Son and Father and the relationship they have to one another in verse 17-30.

The Father	The Son
Stands in peculiar relation to the Son. The Father is working from eternity until the present time. (verse 17)	Is working with in the same constant and eternal sense as the Father. (verse 17)
Initiates the works of the Son (verse 19)	Is dependent on the Father (verse 19)
Loves the Son and shows the Son all He himself is doing (verse 20)	The Son has perfect knowledge of the Father (verse 19)
Raises the dead and gives life (verse 21)	Also gives life and raises whom He wills from the dead ⁵⁰ (verse 21,25,28)
Gives the power of judgement to the Son (verse 22,27)	Has been given the authority to execute divine judgement because he is the Son of Man ⁵¹ (verse 27-29)
Equal in honour with the Son (verse 23)	Equal in honour with the Father (verse 23)

⁵⁰ Morris (1971:314) indicates that this is very significant. According to Old Testament passages like: Deuteronomy 31:39; 1 Samuel 2:6 & 2 Kings 5:7, it is only God who raises the dead and gives life. Jesus was proclaiming that He (the Son) can also do the same.

⁵¹ Hendriksen (1976:203) states that despite the absence of an article before the Son of Man does not negate the messianic meaning of this term for it was common place for official titles to lack a definite article. Hendriksen (1976:206) states on a survey of the use of this term by Jesus in the Gospels the reference to Daniel 7:13-14 is unmistakable.

Those who believe the Father who sent the Son and the words of the Son have eternal life ⁵² (verse 24)	Is the way to eternal life (verse 24-25)
Has inherent life and has granted it to the Son (verse 26)	Has been granted inherent life by the Father (verse 26)

Morris (1971:311-312) states that this passage is crucial as all that Jesus proclaims and does throughout his ministry depends on the truth that is set forth in this passage. Furthermore, it is emphasised that nowhere else in the Gospels such clear evidence is found of Jesus providing such a clear, concise, and systematic exposition of His own unity with the Father, His divine commission and authority and evidences for His Messiahship. The foundation of the truth of the Gospel lies in Jesus' Messiahship, the Son of God and evidently He has made it plain.

3.3.2 Jesus defends His claim (Verse 31-47)

Jesus, however does not halt His conversation at this juncture. He does not expect those listening to blatantly accept what has been said by blind faith. This is clearly seen within verse 31. After making these great, and definitely radical, claims He then proceeds to support and justify these claims in verse 31-47. This is where the apologetic key lies as Jesus is giving a defence of His claims by appealing to various testimonies that would support His authority in making these divine claims. This is a key element because according to Old Testament law, as seen in passages like Deuteronomy 19:15; 17:6 & Numbers 35:30, as well as in Jewish tradition, multiple corroborating witnesses were essential to Jewish legal procedure (Köstenberger, 2004:191; Geisler & Zukeran, 2009:17; Burge 2000:179). A person's own testimony alone is not valid in a court of law. A testimony is only valid if there are two or three witnesses to testify the truth of the witness' claims.

However, Carson (1991:259) states that if Jesus says something about Himself it does not necessarily mean it must be false.⁵³ However, it seems that what is being stated here is that: if the burden of proof for these extraordinary claims lay solely on His own testimony, then it can be seen as false. However, there is a nuanced point that Jesus makes when He is claiming

⁵² Morris (1971:316) states that it is essential to understand the form of the expression in this instance. What is implied here is that those who really believe the Father will also accept the Son. The theme that is greatly emphasised here is the inseparably unity of the Father and the Son therefore it is impossible to believe the Father and not the son.

⁵³ For this would be in contrast to John 8:12-14. This is exactly the objection that the Pharisees had charged him with in this passage. Jesus admits in this context that if he bears testimony about himself his testimony will still be true. But is this a contradiction? This researcher would state that it isn't for when Jesus states that he is bearing witness about himself there is a finer nuance that is being conveyed.

something about himself with regards to giving solitary testimony. The key lies in verse 19 and again in verse 30 where it is clear that the Son can do nothing alone and only does what the Father does. Therefore, Jesus' witness is not only his own witness but also per definition, the Father's witness (Köstenberger, 2004:190; Carson, 1991:260). Jesus' makes this very point in verse 32, that what justifies claims made by Him, is that another bears witness of Him and qualifies Jesus' testimony. This witness is the Father with whom Jesus has a clear, constant and intimate relationship.⁵⁴

Jesus proceeds to provide five witnesses namely John the Baptist, His own works, the Father, Old Testament Scripture and Moses. These witnesses not only serve to justify Jesus' own claims, but seek to convict those listening of their error regarding their understanding of the Messiah (Geisler & Zukeran; 2009:17).

3.3.2.1 The first witness: John the Baptist (verse 33-35)

What establishes John the Baptist as a credible witness is his mission of bearing witness of the coming light.⁵⁵ Furthermore in chapter 1 of the Gospel of John, John the Baptist had borne witness to the delegation of religious leaders sent from Jerusalem⁵⁶ and had publically proclaimed that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world⁵⁷ (Carson, 1991:260). Calvin (1847:212-213) states that it is key that Jesus presses them with John's testimony – for they acknowledged that John was a prophet, otherwise they would not have sent a delegation inquiring about the identity of the Messiah. Furthermore, the acknowledgment in verse 35 that John's testimony was a light in which many rejoiced, bolstering the truth of John being a credible witness. The testimony also indicts Jesus' accusers for their superficiality and insincerity (Köstenberger, 2004:192).

3.3.2.2 The second witness: Jesus' own works (verse 36)

The term "works" refers to divine miracles which are a sign of divine power (Tenney, 1954:108; Carson, 1991:261; Hendriksen, 1976:208). In John 3:2 Nicodemus admits that Jesus is a true teacher/prophet from God because of the very signs and miracles confirming that He is speaking for the Lord. Furthermore, it is noteworthy to point out that as Paul writes of the Jews seeking after signs and miracles (1 Corinthians 1:22). This test of truth by the Jews is rooted in the Old Testament in passages like Deuteronomy 18:22. There is great irony in the matter, for the entire

⁵⁴ In the passage in John 8:12-20 Jesus expounds on this fact again. This resolves the seeming contradiction because even if Jesus gives testimony about himself it isn't just his own literal testimony but because of his intimate relationship with the Father it is also the Father's necessarily.

⁵⁵ John 1:7

⁵⁶ John 1:19-28

⁵⁷ John 1:29-34

cause of this discourse was Jesus' performance of a miracle. The Jews had known the man; an invalid for 38 years, who Jesus had healed. Therefore, Jesus is providing a legitimate witness to the credibility of his teaching through the various miracles that he performs. "Jesus does not ask people to believe in him by some blind leap of faith; he offers his works as evidence for his messianic claims." (Köstenberger, 2004:192)

Though the deference to this witness also needs to be understood in the context of John 5:19-30. Jesus explained his divine relationship to the Father – which goes beyond the claims of a prophet. Jesus is doing nothing more or nothing less than what the Father gives to him, therefore the works that Jesus are doing are uniquely divine in that they are the direct works of God (Carson; 1991:262).

3.3.2.3 The third witness: The Father (verse 37-38)

When taking into consideration the context of 5:19-30 where Jesus explains the relationship between the Father and the Son, the reference to the Father as witness is clear. It is because of this unique and intimate relation between the Father and the Son, that Jesus is doing and saying these things. For his witness is the Father's witness. Therefore, since Jesus' works are more than that of a mere prophet, in this sense the Father bears witness to Christ.

Though not explicitly mentioned in the Gospel of John, the witness of the Father could also refer to the event of Jesus' baptism that is depicted in the other Gospels.⁵⁸ In all of these accounts it is indicated that Jesus is the Son whom the Father loves and in whom He is well pleased (Carson 1991:262; Hendriksen, 1976:208). Calvin (1847:216) extends the concept of the Father's witness to all the times the Father had made the coming hope of salvation and restoration of Israel known in the Old Testament.

In verse 38 there is a shift from defence to indictment as Jesus expounds on another aspect of the Father being a witness. Jesus specifically utilizes these indictments to show their lack of understanding of the Father as evidence for their unbelief in the one that the Father sent. Carson (1991:262) & Köstenberger (2004:192-193) succinctly expand on the meaning of each of the indictments.

The first indictment is "*that His voice you have never heard*". This is in contrast to Moses who heard the voice of God in Exodus 33:11. Jesus expresses the very words of God yet the Jews do not listen. Therefore, they are not true followers of Moses.

⁵⁸ Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; & Luke 3:21-22.

The second indictment is “*his form you have never seen*”. This is in contrast to Jacob who had seen God face to face in Genesis 32:30-31. Jesus is the very manifestation of God incarnate – yet the Jews do not see. Therefore, they are not true Israelites.

The third indictment “*and you do not have his word abiding in you*”. This is in contrast to Joshua in Joshua 1:8-9 and the Psalmist in Psalm 119:11. Jesus is the very word of God – yet they do not abide in him. Therefore, they do not share in the blessing as Joshua or the Psalmist do.

In verse 38 these lack of characteristics is taken to their logical conclusion. If the Jews had exemplified these three key aspects like their forefathers in ancient times, then they would have accepted the one that the Father has sent. For the one the Father has sent does not do anything else other than what the Father is doing. Their reason for rejecting the messiah is that they do not exemplify any of these aspects. This links with two more indictments that are made. In verse 42 it is made clear that that their unbelief is because of the lack of love within the hearts of Jesus’ opponents. In verse 44 Jesus exposes one of the main factors of the persisting unbelief – which is pride – their constant search for self-glorification over against the glory of God.

3.3.2.4 The fourth witness: The Old Testament Scriptures. (verse 39-44)

This section opens with Jesus’ acknowledgment that his opponents are good students of Scripture. In fact, Köstenberger (2004:193) indicates that Jewish diligence in the study of the Torah was legendary. However, despite this diligent study of Scripture, Jesus’ opponents still refused to accept him even though the scripture testifies clearly about Jesus. The whole purpose of this extensive study of scripture was misguided, for eternal life does not lie within the mere reading of scripture, but in acceptance of what is written, which in this case would be the indication of the coming Messiah who is Jesus (Hendriksen, 1976:209).

Tenney (1954:110) indicates that there is a definite reference to the claim of Old Testament prophecy in this section. There are a multitude of Old Testament messianic prophecies and Jesus’ reference to the Scriptures, which is in a general sense, as being a witness would therefore contain them all. In Luke 24:27 it is made evident that Jesus worked through the Jewish Scriptures explaining to the disciples on the road to Emmaus what the Old Testament Scriptures had indicated concerning himself.

Some of the key messianic prophecies which Jesus would elude to in this fourth witness to his authority would include: Deuteronomy 18:15, Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Micah 5:2 & Zechariah 9:9 (Archer, 2007:326).

3.3.2.5 The fifth and final witness: Moses (verse 45-47)

From pointing to Scripture (being the Old Testament at the time of Jesus) in a general sense, Jesus now proceeds to a very specific witness from the Scriptures, the greatest prophet and teacher of the Jews, Moses.

Geisler & Zukeran (2009:22) state that the appeal to Moses is very significant. Moses, considered to be one of the greatest prophets and the author of the Old Testament Law, will be their accuser. This is very important, for the law was never intended be for salvation of itself, but it served to point to Jesus Christ. This is illustrated by what Jesus stated in Matthew 5:17 – which he came to fulfil the very law that Moses received, codified and taught. The reason Jesus' statement would be especially shocking to many Jews in Jesus' day is: (according to Old Testament and literature from the second temple period literature) saw Moses in the role of continuous mediator and advocate (Carson, 1991:265; Köstenberger, 2004:194).

Referring to Moses as a witness insinuates that Moses witnessed of Christ in various passages in the Torah.⁵⁹ One of the most prominent passages would be that of Deuteronomy 18:15-19 saying that God would raise among the people of Israel a prophet just like Moses. Carson (1991:266) admits that it could most likely be one of the prominent passages in view.⁶⁰

Even though Jesus is not directly quoting a passage written by Moses in this instance in the Gospel of John, this key concept of Moses writing about Jesus is clearly referenced and explained in other passages in the New Testament⁶¹ with specific reference to Deuteronomy 18:15-19. These passages serve to demonstrate that Jesus' followers clearly understood that He was the prophet of whom Moses wrote.

Kaiser (1995:59) states in accordance with Deuteronomy 34:10-12 and Numbers 12:6-8 that Moses was indeed a unique prophet, he was distinct from all other prophets that would follow. When it is claimed in Deuteronomy 18 that the coming prophet would be like Moses, it means that the unique characteristics of Moses would also be applied to this specific prophet. When taking the three aforementioned passages in unison it is inferred that this coming prophet like Moses

⁵⁹ Kaiser (1995:36-37) and Hendriksen (1976:211) lists six prominent Messianic prophecies in the Torah namely: Genesis 3:15, Genesis 9:27, Genesis 12:3, Genesis 22:18, Genesis 49:10, Numbers 24:17 & Deuteronomy 18:18.

⁶⁰ Hendriksen (1976:211) notes that although there are specific passages it is in fact the whole of the Torah in all of its theological expression that points to Christ.

⁶¹ Some of the examples Kaiser (1995:60) mentions are for instance in John 1:43-45 when Philip goes to find Nathanael to tell him about Jesus it is explicitly stated "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." In John 6:14 after miraculous feeding of the five thousand the people identified Jesus as the prophet. In Acts 3:12 when Peter addresses the crowds it is mention that the entirety of the Old Testament testifies to Jesus being the Messiah. The most significant aspect in this passage however is that Peter directly refers to Deuteronomy 18:15-19 making the connection that the prophet that is said to come from amongst the people as mentioned by Moses, is in fact Jesus Christ. The identity of Jesus being the prophet is also alluded to in Stephen's sermon just before he was martyred in Acts 7:37.

would be an Israelite, authorized to declare God's word with authority, performing miracles in the public before the nations. Furthermore, he would have an unusually intimate relationship with the Father, he would be a lawgiver, and he would be a mediator, and a deliverer of God's people. Therefore, utilizing Moses as a witness serves to provide rational justification for the claims that Jesus is making to be the prophet that should come.

3.3.3 Key principles

It is clear with the use of these five key witnesses⁶² Jesus provides more than sufficient rational justification for the divine claims that he made. This passage has shown that Jesus had an appreciation for appeals to evidence and the importance of fact based thinking (Coleman & Carter, 2009:60). Furthermore, Coleman & Carter (2009:61) note that by providing multiple witnesses to attest for His claims, Jesus constructed a compelling argument, which was more resistant to critique, for there were multiple independent supports to His claims.

The motivating factor for providing this apologetic testimony is made clear in verse 34. Jesus clarifies that the testimony that He receives is not from man. Christ does not require this for himself, but does so for the advantage for other people as to bring them to salvation (Calvin, 1847:213). All these multiple testimonies are for a single end: "*That you might be saved*". The purpose of apologetics with its critical relationship to evangelism has been made clear in this single verse. Apologetics contends and defends for the truth of the Christian faith in making and abolishing arguments to make way for the message of salvation of the Gospel. There is no appeal to a blind leap of faith. This point is succinctly captured by Tenny (1954:111) "As the various elements are illustrated and developed in the text, they provide a rational ground for confidence in the living Christ, and an appeal to the reader for self-committal."

⁶² Tenny (1954:111) also adds two more witnesses that were not explicitly mentioned at the time Jesus was having this discourse. That would be the testimony of the Person of the Holy Spirit as well as the disciples who empowered by that same Spirit preach the Gospel to all nations. This would serve to ultimately provide a seven-fold witness.

3.4 Acts 26:1-29

3.4.1 Background

The series of events that have led to this event started all the way back in Acts 21 where Paul was initially arrested in Jerusalem after the Jews tried to kill him. In chapter 22, after being arrested by the Roman commander Claudius Lysias, it was discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen. In chapter 23, thanks to the warning of Paul's nephew, Paul was securely moved from Jerusalem to Caesarea to face trial before the Roman Governor Felix. In chapter 24 and 25 Paul stood separate trials before both Governor Felix as well as Governor Festus, Felix's successor. After appealing the right to stand trial before Caesar, Paul in chapter 26 stands before King Agrippa, Festus, and all the high ranking officers and leading figures of Caesarea.⁶³ It is in this trial⁶⁴ that one of the most striking examples of how Christians are to engage in apologetics is provided. It is a great illustration of the use of reason, persuasion, and evidence in evangelism (Fernando, 1998:602). In comparison to Paul's other speeches in the book of Acts - this one may be called his *apologia pro vita sua* which consist of not only a defence of his own innocence, but also the truth of the Gospel itself (Bruce, 1988:461; Bock, 2007:713; Thomas, 2011:693).

3.4.2 Paul's former life, conversion and calling (verse 1-23)

The trial commences in verse 1 where king Agrippa has motioned Paul to begin his defence (his *apologia* – Acts 24:10). Before proceeding to his defence, Paul addresses Agrippa in verse 2-3 in a customary rhetorical acknowledgement known as the *captatio benevolentiae* (Thomas 2011:693). Even though Paul is making a defence in the presence of many high ranking official and military leaders, there is a direct appeal to King Agrippa. The king knows the Jewish theological background from which Paul is about to make his case (Peterson 2009:659).

In verse 4-18 Paul provides his own personal story as a testimony of his blamelessness. The story is divided into three phases namely: Paul as a strict Pharisee (verse 4-8); Paul as persecutor of the church (verse 9-11), and Paul as commissioned apostle after having seen the vision on the Damascus road (12-18) (Stott, 1991:370; Thomas, 2011:693).

When explaining the life Paul once had as a strict Pharisee, it is mentioned that this knowledge is public and known by all Jews. In fact, in reference to verses 4-8 Bock (2007:714) indicates that

⁶³ The intention for this great audience's, especially for Agrippa's, input to evaluate this matter is explained in 25:26-27. According to Festus' knowledge Paul has not done anything worthy of punishment but because Paul has now appealed to stand before Caesar Festus would require some account or reason for sending Paul to Caesar.

⁶⁴ In Acts 26 variations of the Greek word *apologia*, from which the term apologetics comes from in the famous passage of 1 Peter 3:15 (Thomas, 2011:693). Furthermore, the term also appears at least three times in this chapter alone i.e. verse 1,2 & 24.

Paul thoroughly identifies with being Jewish. The key phrase is this: “*I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day.*” The roots of Paul’s new faith are old and ancient, keeping with the Jewish promise in the Old Testament (Keener, 2015:3530). It was not in spite of Paul’s Jewish heritage, but because of it, that he was proclaiming the resurrection. This serves to demonstrate that the Jewish hope and the Christian gospel are inseparably related⁶⁵ (Thomas, 2011:694; Peterson, 2009:661). This is key for insight to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in that it is kept in line with the Jewish promise as seen later in verse 22-23 (Bock, 2007:714).

In verse 9-11 it is clear that there was public knowledge of Paul’s former life as a zealous Pharisee who, in great severity and extent, had persecuted the followers of Jesus (Peterson, 2009:664). It was well known to his contemporaries and those whom he persecuted.⁶⁶

In verses 12-22 Paul tells of the radical change in his life following the incident on the road to Damascus, which transformed him from a persecutor of Christians to being a vigorous protagonist of their beliefs (Peterson, 2009:664). This section also includes the subsequent calling by Christ to preach the gospel to both the Jews and the Gentiles. Thomas (2011:695) states that the radical change in Paul’s life, as a result of the experience at Damascus, can even be corroborated by Paul’s current enemies. Due to the fact that Paul was well known for being a zealous persecutor, the appeal to such a miraculous event may be the only explanation for such a radical change in Paul’s life (Habermas & Licona, 2004:64-65). Therefore, this is one of the lines of evidence that Paul provides. He does so, not only to justify his innocence, but especially to display the truth of the Christian faith. Another key characteristic in Paul’s calling by Christ are the prophetic allusions in verse 16-18. The way in which Paul is called, empowered, and commissioned is similar to that of the canonical prophets in the Old Testament⁶⁷ (Peterson, 2009:668). Therefore, Paul’s mission is not only in continuity with the prophets of the Old Testament, but also with the mission of Christ in the divine plan to bring salvation to both Israel and the Gentiles (Peterson, 2009:668).

In verse 22-23 Paul explains the justification for the message he preaches for nothing new has been proclaimed save that which Moses and the prophets said would come to pass. Paul is appealing to the fulfilment of the promises and prophecies in Old Testament in Christ as justification for his belief and action (Peterson, 2009:671). Even though Paul specifically points to

⁶⁵ Peterson (2009:661) states Old Testament texts like Hosea 6:1-2; Ezekiel 37:11-14; Isaiah 25:8; 26:19 & Daniel 12:1-2 link the hope of the restoration of Israel with the resurrection theme.

⁶⁶ In Galatians 1:11-24 Paul again utilizes his personal testimony as a vindication and evidence of the call of God. What is prevalent in Galatians 1 is especially verse 23 “*He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.*” This indicates that it was common knowledge as well as in the headlines of the Christian community that the former zealous persecutor had become one of them (Habermas & Licona, 2004:65).

⁶⁷ The prophetic allusions to which Paul’s calling are similar may be like that found in Isaiah 42:6-7, Jeremiah 1:7-8, Ezekiel 2:1-3.

the prophets and to Moses, each of the three events that are predicted may provide a picture of the suffering servant in the book of Isaiah (Stott, 1991:375-376; Keener, 2015:3532-3533). First, the Christ is to suffer,⁶⁸ secondly the Christ is to rise from the dead⁶⁹ and thirdly is to be a light to his own people as well as the Gentiles.⁷⁰ Fernando (1998:597) states that what Paul expresses in verse 23 shows the centrality of the resurrection to the Gospel. In the reality of Christ's suffering and resurrection there is the hope of eternal life for both Jews and Gentiles.

In this section Paul has provided three avenues of evidence that clears him as innocent. Then he also establishes himself as a reliable witness; speaking the truth. The radical change from his former life as a Pharisee and persecutor begs to be explained. Furthermore, many people were well aware of this significant change in his life, both friend and foe. The final line of evidence Paul provides concerns what he has witnessed, moreover, that what he preaches is nothing but fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy.

3.4.3 Pinnacle of Paul's defence (verse 24-29)

This section particularly focusses on verse 24-27, which denote the highlight of Paul's defence before King Agrippa and Governor Festus. Paul proceeds to rebut the charge of insanity by contending that everything he believes and has spoken of thus far is objectively true, logically reasonable, known to all, and is a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. In this section Paul is now actively attempting to persuade his hearers by contending for the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

3.4.3.1 True and reasonable words (verse 24-26)

In the middle of Paul's defence, Festus interrupts with the charge of insanity⁷¹ against Paul. When someone as wise as Paul believes things such as this, the only explanation and reaction to it Festus can give is that it was Paul's wisdom and great learning that made him crazy. Festus most likely thinks of Paul's visions of Jesus as a form of momentary insanity, diversified with the insanity of inspiration, rhetoric and even due to Paul's great learning - a form of philosophical insanity (Keener, 2015:3534).

⁶⁸ Isaiah 53:4

⁶⁹ Isaiah 52:13, 53:12

⁷⁰ Isaiah 42:6, 49:6, 60:3

⁷¹ Bruce (1998:471) notes that for Festus, the instance of an educated man that spoke so earnestly and at length about things no sensible Roman attached any meaning to and also which antagonized the whole of this own nation was clear evidence that he must be insane. Bock (2007: 722) add that this doctrine would indeed seem insane to a Roman who most likely only believed in the immortality of the soul (Acts 17:18,32). Nonetheless, this expression by Festus also serves to indicate as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 1:23 that the gospel is foolishness to the Gentiles.

Paul's response is of the greatest importance in handling this type of reaction in an apologetic discourse. Paul responds to Festus in a graceful and respectful manner by addressing him properly according to the authority as governor: "*Oh most excellent Festus.*" Paul indicates that he takes Festus seriously, by repeating what Festus said, and then counters this objection by indicating that he is not insane rather that the words he is speaking are true (ἀληθείας) and reasonable (σωφροσύνης).

At this juncture it is essential to understand what is meant by these terms. With regards to the root word for 'truth', ἀληθεία, Louw and Nida (1988a:673) state that it means the contents of that which is truth i.e. in accordance to what had actually had taken place. Louw and Nida (1988a:667) state that on the slight variation to the word that appears in the text of Acts, the term ἀληθείας means "that which pertains to being real, an actual event or state." In its usage in the original Greek it may take on various differentiations but the base concept entails 'non concealment' or something that has been disclosed as it really is (Bultmann, 1964:238). Quell (1964:232) indicates the Old Testament Hebrew term that is translated into the Greek, ἀληθεία, in the Septuagint is עֵמֶת (emet). עֵמֶת denotes a reality which is to be regarded as being firm, solid, valid or binding.

"It has reference to facts which always demand recognition by all men as reality, to the normal state which corresponds to divine and human order, and which is thus to be respected." (Quell, 1964:234)

With regards to ἀληθεία in early Christian usage, among the various different inclinations of the word, Bultmann (1964:242-243) identifies that one of the major usages of the word entails disclosing the "real state of affairs" i.e. that which is really the case. It may also be utilized to depict reliability and trustworthiness.

In the context of Paul's usage of ἀληθεία in Acts 26 – its meaning becomes quite clear – especially also in the light of the aforementioned definitions and usage of the word. The things that Paul are speaking of are objectively true as they correspond to reality⁷² and are impending on all people regardless of their own personal beliefs, wishes, and motives. The sense of it being *non-concealment and disclosing* – that which really is – is also prominent. Paul further states that these things that are proclaimed to be true; "have not been done in a corner."

⁷² With regards to the definition of truth, Kreeft (2014:145) provides a most basic definition: "telling it like it is". To be more specific though: "truth is then basically the conformity of thought to thing; mind to reality, thought's subject to thought's object" (Kreeft, 2014:145).

This definition of Kreeft is known as the correspondence theory of truth, so to reiterate: when something is claimed to be true then it has to correspond with reality. Therefore, when there is discussion on the truth of the Christian faith it means that what it claims, like Jesus Christ rising from the dead, really happened within space- time reality. The nature of truth would then entail that it is objective and binding to all people regardless of opinion or feeling.

With regards to the term 'reasonable', *σωφροσύνης*, Louw and Nida (1988a:384) state that it denotes having sound judgement, to be sensible or to utilize good sense. Etymologically the meaning of the term can take on many variations, but the main understanding of this term denotes rationality or being sound of mind. Paul's use of the term in Acts 26:25 is to respond to the charge of mania; claiming that the words that Paul are speaking can be rationally understood and tested for truth (Luck, 1971:1102).

3.4.3.2 Not been done in a corner (verse 26-27)

It is clear that Paul is stating that the words he is speaking are in fact true. They convey the real state of affairs that actually took place, and that they are reasonable in that they are logically sound and can be rationally understood. Paul provides rational justification for these true and reasonable words by addressing King Agrippa directly in verse 26. *"For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner."* In this statement Paul asserts that King Agrippa, already being identified with being familiar with Jewish affairs, is familiar with the events surrounding the emergence of Christianity (Peterson, 2009:673).

Pelikan (2005:276) states 'these things' refer to three major events which Paul has already mentioned: firstly, Paul's conversion story (26:9-19); Paul's missionary activity as well as the danger associated with it (26:20-21) but more importantly, the most fundamental event, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ⁷³ (26:22-23). The phrase 'not been done in a corner' refers the fact that the events surrounding the emergence of Christianity are not attributed to hidden events tucked away somewhere in the corner, outside of public site (Bock, 2007:722; Peterson, 2009:674). Keener (2015:3544) notes that the specific use of this phrase is very significant. The reason why this concept is so essential is that it distinguishes the essence of Christianity with that of many of the mystery cults of the day. The truths of Christianity are available for anyone to go and investigate. This is a great advantage when engaging in apologetic dialogue as it shows that Christianity does not shy away from criticism. In fact, a person is encouraged to search investigate and seek the truth.

In verse 27 Paul further pressed the appeal by reference to the prophets of the Old Testament of whom King Agrippa was not only familiar with, but whose authority he accepted. Therefore, Paul is boldly laying claim to public evidence that anyone may go investigate and verify (as these things

⁷³ It was this claim of the reality of the resurrection that brought both hostility and derision from both unbelieving Jews (Acts 4:2) and Gentiles (Acts 17:32).

are public knowledge) - and that they conform to what has been promised since ancient times by the prophets in the Old Testament (Keener, 2015:3545).

On the matter of providing clear rational justification/evidence, Pelikan (2005:276) notes that this appeal to public and verifiable evidence was in line with a prominent theme in Paul's writings. The most significant instance would be Paul utilizing it in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 where the various witnesses to the historical event of the resurrection are listed. In fact, this leads to the key element explaining that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is indispensable to the Gospel message. Paul, and the other apostles constantly emphasised this point in many instances when the Gospel was preached. Nowhere is this crucial point made more evident than in 1 Corinthians 15:14 "*And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.*" The resurrection of Jesus Christ as a real space-time historical event is interlocked with that of saving faith (Habermas & Licona, 2004:260). If there is no resurrection, then there is no saving faith. Therefore, in all of the teaching and preaching of the apostles there is a clear emphasis on the resurrection upon which the sure foundation of the hope of Gospel is founded as already mentioned with regards to verse 23.

What Paul is demonstrating in these verses is well summarized by Bruce (1988:471):

"The ministry and death of Jesus were matters of common knowledge; his resurrection was amply attested; the gospel had been openly proclaimed in his name. Anyone who believed the prophets and compare their predictions with the historical facts concerning Jesus of Nazareth must acknowledge the truth of Christianity."

Paul has effectively strengthening his case to make his conclusion of Christ's revelation, very difficult to evade.

3.4.3.3 Persuading Agrippa (verse 28-29)

Appealing to the evidence, Paul was confident that the king could be persuaded of the truth (Stott; 1991:379). Claiming that Agrippa is aware of common information and also believes in the prophets Paul is implying that if one accepts these things, then one will consequently accept the veracity of the truth of Christianity and believe in Jesus (Keener, 2015:3545). However, in verse 28, the king does not respond to the case that Paul had made. This appeal by Paul was an embarrassment for the king as he was forced into a dilemma of some sorts and needed to address Paul's appeal (Bruce, 1988:471; Bock, 2007:723; Keener, 2015:3546). If the king affirms that what the prophets said relates to Jesus, then this affirmation could be placed within the esteemed governor Festus' criteria of insanity. If the king denies that he believed in the authority of the prophets, then most assuredly there would be trouble amongst the Jewish people. The king was

familiar with Jewish theology and public historical records and would have understood what Paul is appealing to. Therefore, knowing what Paul is doing, the king sets aside Paul's appeal by focussing on Paul's aim, and retorts: "*In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian?*"

In a masterful rhetorical interject Paul admits he wishes to persuade the king. Paul does not in his interject speak only to the king but extends his appeal to all the other officials that were also listening. Paul was strategically utilizing his opportunity to attempt to persuade not only King Agrippa and Governor Festus but as a matter of fact, his entire audience. In contrast to Agrippa's quip of being suddenly convinced Paul indicates whether it be sudden or gradual, he calls Agrippa and his other hearers to become like him, one who is a follower of Christ⁷⁴ (Keener, 2015:3548).

3.5 A response to fideism

Tkacz (2002:141) notes the rising trend of the philosophy of fideism within society leading to a separation of faith and reason. The result thereof is the view of faith on a popular level that has become such that faith is seen as non-rational, private, and unverifiable. Basically, it entails that religious belief cannot be established rationally and that any claims of faith cannot be rationally justified.

This view of faith, as seen in the introduction, is quite common not only among non-believing secularists but also among many Christians. In the light of the preceding study of key passages in the New Testament, it will now be essential to evaluate whether it is a meritorious or detrimental philosophy to the Christian faith. But before the evaluation of fideism's potential merits and errors, it would be necessary to provide a base definition as well as a brief history of the development of fideism.

3.5.1 Definition

Plantinga (1983:87) provides the following formal definition of fideism:

"exclusive or basic reliance upon faith alone, accompanied by a consequent disparagement of reason and utilized especially in the pursuit of philosophical or religious truth."

Penelhum (2010:442) provide a similar definition:

⁷⁴ This is a great demonstration of Paul's evangelistic fervor as Paul is doing nothing less than what he has told his hearers Jesus Christ had commissioned him to do in Acts 26:18 which is to: "*open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.*"

“Most commonly, the fideist will hold that faith does not meet the standards of evidence or proof, but may go further and maintain that its proclamations are paradoxical. In both its moderate and its radical form, fideism will involve the denigration of reason as a source of spiritual truth and will find grounds in the nature of faith for holding that reason’s support is a liability rather than an asset.”

Boa & Bowman (2005:338) provide a similar definition of fideism. Fideism argues that the truths of faith cannot and should not be justified rationally. Furthermore, fideism entails that faith alone is the only way to the truths of Christianity.

Dougherty & Tweedt (2015:547) note that fideism itself may be manifest in different forms and that it is not necessarily a singular structure of thought. There is extreme fideism – which states that one may hold to a religious belief without any rational justification even when the belief is in direct contrast to reason. There is moderate fideism, which states that the evidences for religious belief are ambiguous at best and that the only “justification” for belief would be the moral, spiritual and existential nature of the belief.⁷⁵ Lastly, there is weak fideism which states that in order to have some form of rational justification for religious belief, one must first have faith.⁷⁶ Despite fideism being able to manifest itself in different forms, there is still a universal aspect concerning a particular relationship between faith and reason that places them all under the main idea of fideism. It is in this broadest category in which the idea of fideism will be discussed in this study.

Before addressing the idea of fideism itself it is essential to make a distinction between the philosophical idea of fideism and that of ordinary religious belief or faith.⁷⁷ The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2016) makes the following essential distinction: *“Fideism” is thus to be understood not as a synonym for “religious belief,” but as denoting a particular philosophical account of faith’s appropriate jurisdiction vis-a-vis that of reason.*” Fideism makes the positive case that faith is the only way to truth and that it does not require any reason and evidence. In fact, this idea indicates that reason and evidence is in direct conflict with faith. What is not being addressed in the study is the situation in which a believer has faith though they may not have a vast array of evidence and arguments to support it at that point in time. This does not fall under the idea of fideism as believers are still open to reason and evidence. They may never have thought about it before or are content with the simplistic reasons they may have at that point in

⁷⁵ These lines of justification at best still remain predominantly subjective.

⁷⁶ This view still states that faith is dominant over reason in that reason is only a subset that becomes viable after faith has been attained. The concept of the “leap of faith” is still present before any form of rational justification for such a leap has been established.

⁷⁷ It is essential to understand the true nature of biblical faith as an act of the of the submission of the will. It entails a personal trust in God and that He will do what He says He will do in His Word (Howe & Howe, 2004:28-29)

time, but again, this is not fideism. Therefore, it is the crucial distinction between fideism, as a positive contended philosophical idea, and the personal state of a believer's faith.

It is essential to note that this study does not deny that faith is a gift from God.⁷⁸ It is clear that people are unable to save themselves.⁷⁹ The second crucial distinction is concerning the concept of faith itself. While fideism would place faith as an issue of gaining truth, the biblical definition of truth would place faith as a soteriological issue; people are incapable of and refuse to submit their wills to God. It is only through the Holy Spirit that people can move from unbelief to true faith.⁸⁰

Since the Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth,⁸¹ He will not authenticate anything that is clearly false. Warfield (1903:24-25) explains:

"The Holy Spirit does not work a blind, an ungrounded faith in the heart. What is supplied by his creative energy in working faith is not a ready-made faith, rooted in nothing, and clinging without reason to its object; nor yet new grounds of belief in the object presented; but just a new ability of the heart to respond to the grounds of faith, sufficient in themselves, already present to the understanding."

3.5.2 Historical Roots

Tracing the historical roots of fideism can be a subject for an entire study alone. However, for the sake of this study, a brief overview will suffice. A brief survey of the following major figures will serve to illustrate how some of their ideas directly advocated fideism and in other instances indirectly, and in some cases unintentionally, laid the foundations for fideism.

3.5.2.1 William of Ockham

One of the possible major starting points for the development of fideism as a more main stream ideology may be traced back to the middle ages. The significant event which took place in this period was said to be the unravelling of the medieval synthesis of faith and reason, a synthesis which was exemplified by many medieval thinkers, most notably Thomas Aquinas. The major unravelling would be caused by another medieval thinker known as William of Ockham (1285-1347).

The two fundamental elements that drove Ockham's thinking are of a theological and philosophical nature (Gilson, 1999:59-60; Lawhead, 2015:202). The theological element entails a radical conception of God's omnipotence in such a manner that there are no rational necessities

⁷⁸ Ephesians 2:8-9.

⁷⁹ Romans 3:23

⁸⁰ John 6:69, Hebrews 11:6 & 1 John 5:20

⁸¹ John 16:13 & 1 John 5:6.

governing creation. Only that which that does not entail contradiction is to be directly attributed as being caused by God. The philosophical element would entail a radical empiricism in that the mind was unable to go beyond the experience of direct concrete things.

This would clearly bring about an unravelling of the relationship between faith and reason. Reason could only deal with the empirical and could not speak to anything within the realm of faith. Therefore, the truths in the realm of faith did not have any grounds for rational justification. They cannot tell us anything about the truths in the realm of reason; because of God's omnipotence He could have constructed the world in any other way. Fundamental truths of Christianity, whose truthfulness were formerly demonstrated by reason and faith, like the existence of God and the historical resurrection were now deemed only to be knowable through faith (Lawhead, 2015: 206; Sproul *et al*, 1984:28).

In Ockham's thinking, by severing the relationship of faith and reason, two distinct ideologies came to the foreground. On the one hand was that of radical empiricism that would limit true knowledge only to that which is directly experienced. This sounds very familiar to the process and methodology utilized by sceptical philosophers like David Hume and Immanuel Kant (Gilson, 1999:69-70). The other ideology would be that of fideism, which would render the articles of faith indemonstrable by reason, for reason itself cannot comprehensively attain the divine and the transcendental. In fact, if logic and reason cannot tell us anything about God, it naturally leads to the rise of mysticism, which is predominantly fideistic, which emphasizes that God may only be known through direct personal experience (Lawhead, 2015:208). Therefore, all articles of faith should and could only be believed solely on the basis of faith alone for God has willed it so.

3.5.2.2 Michel de Montaigne

Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) was a Roman Catholic thinker whose main thesis encompassed a combination of scepticism and fideism (Dulles, 2005:156-157). This approach had its origin in the era of Counter-Reformation religious controversies when the works of Pyrrhonist⁸² philosopher Sextus Empericus were translated into Latin (Reedy, 1995:84). Utilizing the scepticism of the Pyrrhonists, the main thesis entailed that the human mind was unable to cogently grasp any philosophical or religious truth. Therefore, Montaigne proposed that the only safe manner in which the truth was to be reached was by submitting to the authoritative teaching

⁸² Pyrrhonism comes from the famous ancient Greek skeptical philosopher, Pyrrho of Elis (360-270 B.C.) Pyrrho's declared that sense experience cannot provide any knowledge for we have no way in which to demonstrate that our sense experience has a direct agreement with objective reality. Furthermore, rational argument could also not provide any knowledge for every argument has a counter argument and they then cancel each other out. The resulting consequence is that there is no real knowledge to the real nature of things but only as they subjectively appear to us (Lawhead, 2015:105).

of the church. Other Roman Catholic thinkers like Montaigne's close associate Abbe Pierre Charron (1541-1603) were also representatives of this new movement which would be known as 'Sceptical Christianity' (Reedy, 1995:84; Dulles, 2005:159). In Charron's treatise, "The Three Truths", he contends that the failures of atheism, other non-Christian religions and Protestant Christianity is that they all assume to have any knowledge of God through the use of their reason. Like Montaigne, he contended that the only reliable way to truth was submission to the authoritative and magisterial tradition of the Roman Catholic Church.

Reedy (1995:87) lists three main arguments that sceptical Christianity relied on. The first was a biblical argument drawn from texts like 1 Corinthians 1:19-23. The second argument is from a mystical soteriology, in that only once scepticism has cleansed the soul of the Christian then they could have a true understanding of God's revelation. The third argument entails that any rational inquiry in anyway leads to a system of doubt. The sanctity of Christian faith should not be rationally justified but accepted through a blind leap of faith, otherwise one risks removing faith entirely. Although the movement itself did not become dominant in the Roman Catholic tradition, the principles of scepticism and fideism, would remain with certain figures. On the other hand, it would become especially prominent within Protestant Christianity after the 18th century.

3.5.2.3 Immanuel Kant

Considering the ideas and philosophies that enabled the development of fideism within the wider cultural and intellectual spheres, none had such a great impact as the philosophy of the famous 18th century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) (Dulles, 2005:209; Sproul *et al*, 1984:27). Dulles (2005:267-268) indicates that the entire philosophical enterprise was profoundly affected by the thinking of German philosophers, most notably Kant, in works of epistemology and philosophy of religion. One of the resulting factors was that it created a fertile ground for fideism. In Kant's great work the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant (1965:30) argued that he needed to "deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith." Reason was therefore only limited to organizing data from empirical experience and that it could not deal with the transcendental or the divine.

Penelhum (2010:442) states that fideism shares a unique affinity with scepticism. Scepticism brings the ability to gain truth and the rational demonstration thereof into question. The logical consequence is a vacuum, and especially a spiritual vacuum which fideism is considered to fill. Erdel (2016:194) demonstrates this in the views of Spanish scholar Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo. Because of the influence of the views of philosopher Immanuel Kant, there was a great gap created between the *noumena* and *phenomena*. It created a great problem not just for

epistemology in general, but religious epistemology in particular. Therefore, Unamuno concluded that people can have no evidential or rational knowledge of God. The only logical option available then to reach the truth of the Christians faith was through fideism. This is an example of how the philosophy of Immanuel Kant would ultimately influence many thinkers, especially Christians, in the years to come.

3.5.2.4 Søren Kierkegaard

One of the great Christian thinkers of the 19th century, Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, would also be greatly influenced by Immanuel Kant. Howe & Howe (2004:31) state that Kierkegaard, also known as one of the great founders of modern existentialism,⁸³ was one of the major contributors to the development of fideism. The main idea in Kierkegaard's philosophy that assisted in the growth of fideism, was that the human mind had no capacity of reaching any divine truth of God through the act of reason. In fact, it seemed that Kierkegaard was antagonistic to apologetics in a way as he thought that to contend for the rational plausibility of Christianity will quite ironically destroy it completely (Dulles, 2005:218). The concept of the "leap of faith" was a central aspect of Kierkegaard's existential approach.

3.5.2.5 Karl Barth

The 20th century Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) is one of the most renowned and influential Protestant thinkers in the previous century. With regards to fideism Barth can be said to have one the greatest influences on its development and propagation within contemporary times. Barth warned against the use of rational justification of faith on the basis that it would neglect the quality of faith as a gift of grace leading to doctrinal compromise (Dulles, 2005:323). In the writings of Barth there is evidence of the advocating and articulation of an authentically fideistic approach.

For example, from Barth's commentary on the book of Romans (Barth, 1933:35-38):

"The Gospel requires – faith. Only for those who believe is it the power of God unto salvation. It can therefore be neither directly communicated nor directly apprehended."

"So new so unheard of, so unexpected in this world is the power of God unto salvation, that it can appear among us, be received and understood by us, only as contradiction."

⁸³ Existentialism entails the focus on the existence, meaning and expression of an individual and their capacity to create meaning. The main themes in the existential movement entail the importance of passion over reason, subjectivity over objectivity, and the importance of the individual person over the abstract universal or impersonal crowd (Lawhead, 2015:431).

“The Gospel of salvation can only be believed in; it is a matter of faith only. It demands choice. This is its seriousness. To him that is not sufficiently mature to accept a contradiction and to rest in it, it becomes a scandal – to him that is unable to escape the necessity of contradiction, it becomes a matter of faith.”

Furthermore, Barth (1958:9) claimed:

“Even the minimum postulate of freedom from contradiction is acceptable by theology only when it is given a particular interpretation which the scientific theorist can hardly tolerate, namely, that theology does not affirm in principle that the ‘contradictions’ which it makes cannot be resolved.”

This is the epitome of the fideistic approach which requires no rational justification. The nature of the Gospel in this view – is against reason i.e. it is a blatant contradiction. Faith is therefore a wilful decision or a ‘leap’ to rest in this contradiction. Karl Barth contended that humanity has absolutely no way of achieving any sort of positive knowledge of God through human reason. Barth contended that to do so, would mean that one is denying the sovereign grace of God while understating the noetic effects of sin (Geisler, 2013:44).

3.5.3 Negative aspects of fideism

Fideism’s main contention that rational justification of belief is not only unnecessary but against ‘true’ faith is proven false from a biblical standpoint, as can be seen in the above studied passages, among others. In the discussion of the two passages it was demonstrated that the apostle Paul and Jesus Christ Himself found it sound to provide rational justification for belief in order to convince and persuade their hearers of the truth they were proclaiming. By providing rational justification in order to persuade their listeners, Jesus and Paul were obviously not denigrating the Gospel message. Rather, they were paving the way; opening the doors to it. This is the first reason why fideism is problematic, because its point of departure is clearly in conflict with how the Lord Jesus Himself, as well as the apostle Paul, worked.⁸⁴

The second argument against fideism and what it entails is that it cannot address the issue of relativism and pluralism. The act of relying upon the direct personal experience in fideism creates

⁸⁴ It would be essential to note as well that not only fideism but also the skepticism that accompanied it was also thoroughly unbiblical (Reedy, 1995:88). Nowhere in the Bible is there any indication that its truth rests on skepticism. Rather, the Bible seems to presupposes a certain epistemology and ontology, namely realism. Realism basically entails three major tenants. The first is that there is an objective reality outside ourselves and the things are what they are regardless of our own perceptions and attitudes. The second major tenant is that human beings are capable in coming to know the things in the external world as they are in themselves. The third major tenant is the central importance of the correspondence theory of truth which has already been discussed in previous sections.

a problem in demonstrating the truth of a belief. Habermas and Licona (2004: 27) utilize the example of Mormonism to demonstrate this emphasis on experience alone as an inadequate test for truth. Mormonism places great emphasis on the internal experience of the Holy Spirit as confirming truth. However, this internal religious conformation and experience of a “burning in the bosom” may also be present in other religions. The question that comes to the foreground is “Why would your experience be more true than another?”

The words of the former Roman Catholic pope, John Paul II (1998: n48), encapsulate the danger of this aspect of fideism:

“Deprived of reason, faith has stressed feeling and experience, and so run the risk of no longer being a universal proposition. It is an illusion to think that faith, tied to weak reasoning, might be more penetrating; on the contrary, faith then runs the grave risk of withering into myth or superstition.”

Since there is no basis for deciding whether this personal experience may be more true than another, it follows the relativist mantra “that is only true for you, but it is not true for me.” It creates the problem of being unable to evaluate the truth claims within other religious systems. What follows is religious pluralism, for all experiences are true and valid in their own respects, even though they each possess radically different and mutually exclusive truth claims – which is clearly logically absurd.⁸⁵ This follows with what Boa and Bowman (2005:421) identify as being a serious weakness in fideism, namely the excessive disparagement of reason and knowledge. There is a constant emphasis on personal knowledge of God, but if there is no propositional knowledge that can be accounted, there is no way to determine if what one personally believes correspond in any sense to truth and reality or not (Smith, 2001:117; Geisler, 2013:51-52). It is quite ironic then that in the attempt to value and protect faith, fideism may actually denigrate faith by removing the true rational foundations upon which it is based⁸⁶ (Tkacz, 2002:145). Fideism greatly undermines the role that reason and knowledge may play in challenging unbelief and encouraging faith (Boa & Bowman, 2005:421).

⁸⁵ It is absurd as it violates one of the most fundamental rules in logic, namely the law of non-contradiction. A cannot be both A and non-A at the same time and in the same sense.

⁸⁶ The importance of the relation between truth and faith is a biblical principle evident in passages like Hebrews 11:6 “*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*” The essential first part of God’s true existence function as a rational ground for faith in Him. Geisler (2013:52) would note that this is the essential ‘*believing in*’ and ‘*believing that*’ distinction. Before one is in an absolute commitment to God, there must be some reason to believe that it is the true God to which one is committed. At the same time the fideists are correct in holding that faith is central to salvation and is a gift of God as all orthodox Christians affirm though they would err in disparaging the supporting truths that confirm and strengthen this faith.

The third issue with fideism is that it is logically self-contradictory. Claiming that reason is insufficient and a liability to reach spiritual truths, and that it may only be met by faith, entails that there is a presupposed distinction. How exactly was the conclusion reached that reason is in any way, shape or form inadequate to rationally justify the faith? Was this conclusion reached by the use of rational inquiry? If one draws the line where reason cannot know or justify any spiritual truths, then it seems contradictory to say so. If one were to draw a line, it would entail a distinction and in order to make a distinction one must have sufficient rational knowledge of both sides of the line. Geisler (2013:52-53) states that this is how fideism neglects the importance of the link between reason/propositional truth and the personal reality of knowing God. By stressing the latter and denigrating the former, they undermine the latter - because knowledge of God has been expressed logically, truthfully and propositionally through His revelation.⁸⁷

3.5.4 Some positive aspects of fideism

Even though fideism as a whole is not a rationally sufficient nor biblically compatible system, it must be credited that there are key elements emphasised in fideism that are important for Christians to remember when engaging in apologetics and evangelism.⁸⁸

Boa and Bowman (2005:419) note some of the strengths of fideism. The first is the emphasis on the personal factor which entails the personal relationship with God which is essential in Christianity. This is especially relevant in that when doing apologetics as there is the danger that God can be reduced to an abstract construct rather than the real personal God who has revealed Himself to His creatures and seeks to be unified with them. Propositional knowledge, reason and evidence of the truths of Christianity is the basis for bringing a person to salvation, for faith is more than intellectual, it is volitional. The basis of Christian faith is coming to know who God is in the deepest and most personal sense in which believers are being fully united with Him through the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit (Geisler, 2013:50). Faith encompasses as state or quality of a person who has a certain kind of relation to God, one characterized by trust, belief and obedience (Evans, 2008:1023).⁸⁹

The second strength is the acknowledgement of the limits of human reason. Although, as already demonstrated in the above critique, the extent to which Fideism limits, and even disparages,

⁸⁷ This encompasses God's revelation in both the book of nature (Romans 1:20 & Psalm 19:1) and the book of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17 & 2 Peter 1:20-21)

⁸⁸ It must be noted that these essential points emphasized in fideism, do not solely belong to fideism alone and that holding to and applying them does not make one a fideist.

⁸⁹ With regards to the previously mentioned passage of Hebrews 11:6 this is now the essential second dimension pertaining to Christian belief. Where the verse entails that those who are drawn to God must believe that He exists, it also entails the critical truth that those who draw near to Him actively seek him. Therefore, faith does not just encompass that God exist as a propositional truth but entail a personal dimension of unification, trust and the submission of the will to God.

reason is far too much. However, there is still a kernel of truth in humbly realizing that there are still limits to reason. In fact, Evans (2008:1025) contends that limitations on reason is almost undeniable especially if one considers that the human mind is a finite entity distinct from God. Therefore, key doctrines like the Trinity and the incarnation may be said to be above the reach of human reason by itself, without the help of special revelation. However, just because they are above reason does not entail that these doctrines are against reason in that they may be logically fallacious (Smith, 2001:114; Van Vlastuin, 2016:3).

The third strength that Fideism brought to the table is a constant reminder of the need for a Christ-centred apologetic. The salvation, redemption and hope that comes through Jesus' life, crucifixion and resurrection is the central fundamental aspect in the Christian gospel (Van Vlastuin, 2016:8). This is central because humanity possesses a sinful nature which drives away the will from seeking and submitting to God. Christians are not called to bring people into a philosophical system of thought, but into faith in Christ as seen in Matthew 28:16-20. As previously noted, and is always of need of constant reminder, Jesus himself made clear of the inseparable relationship between apologetics and evangelism in John 5:34: "I say these things so that you may be saved."

3.6 Conclusion

In the light of the texts of John 5 and Acts 26 it is clear that evidence and rational justification of Christian belief is an essential character of Christian apologetics. Both Jesus and Paul saw the importance of reason and evidence in the whole exercise of justifying their own respective arguments and points but also in commending the gospel to try and persuade their hearers. Fideism unnecessarily limits the human mind contrary to what is made clear from the examples in Scripture. A blind and subjective leap into a "contradiction" is not required or Biblical.

Philosophers like Ockham created the opportunity for fideism to flourish when the spheres of faith and reason were separated. Furthermore, Immanuel Kant and Kierkegaard unintentionally help develop the idea which in turn led to theologians like Karl Barth officially establishing it as a popular idea within broader Christian culture. Whilst acting from good intention to articulate faith in its own sphere of knowledge and protect it from the intrusion of scepticism, in the end the rational foundations that support the truths of the Christian faith were undermined.

Fideism as a whole is by no means sufficient for the Christian faith, although there are elements of fideism like the emphasis on a Christ-centred presentation and reaching people with the Gospel

with which can be agreed. However, one may hold to these essential necessary conditions of Christianity without being a fideist.

This article has demonstrated that contrary to the fideistic position, evidence forms an essential component of the gospel and the proclaiming thereof. That said, reason-based evidence is not a substitute for faith and in no ways can replace the central importance of the Gospel message itself. Instead it is an essential component that complements it. God made us reasonable people to live faithfully on this planet and bring others to him.

Chapter 4 - Conclusion

“This combination of the abandonment of evangelism, the divorce between evangelism, apologetics and discipleship, and the failure to appreciate true human diversity is deeply serious. It is probably behind the fact that many Christians, realizing the ineffectiveness of many current approaches and sensing the unpopularity and implausibility of much Christian witness, have simply fallen silent and given up evangelism altogether, sometimes relieved to mask their evasion under a newfound passion for social justice that can forget the gaucheness of evangelism. At best, many of us who take the good news of Jesus seriously are eager and ready to share the good news when we meet people who are open, interested or in need of what we have to share. But we are less effective when we encounter people who are not open, not interested or not needy - in other words, people who are closed, indifferent, hostile, skeptical or apathetic, and therefore require persuasion.” (Guinness, 2015:17)

This is an accurate description of a large swath of the contemporary church and the challenges it faces. Christians⁹⁰ need to be equipped with the basic principles which allow them to effectively defend and commend the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This was the goal of this study, to determine whether logical argumentation and rational justification of belief are components to Christian faith.

It is concluded that from the texts that have been studied, it is evident that logical argumentation and justification of Christian belief are not just useful tools, but seem to be an essential feature in the call of the Christian to apologetics and evangelism.

Titus 1 and Matthew 22 demonstrate clear guiding principles for Christians, when engaging in apologetic dialogue. Titus 1 commands that elders must be ready to refute opposing views in their ministry when guiding the local church. Being able to refute false views requires the core tenants of being able to engage in logical argumentation. In Matthew 22 Jesus provides a clear example in each of the four separate dialogues of how Christians are to love God with their mind. Therefore, loving God with your whole mind encompasses engaging in effective logical argumentation. Effective logical argumentation includes multiple principles that may be learned from Jesus' dialogue, which Christians may follow and apply in their conversations with non-believers.

⁹⁰ This is meant for all Christians and not just experts and so-called intellectuals (Guinness, 2015:37).

In John 5 and Acts 26 it has been established that Jesus and Paul both made use of rational justification for their claims. They strived to persuade their hearers in accepting the Gospel. Therefore, the role of rational justification of Christian belief is a sound biblical principle, that Christians should articulate in their faith. In light of what has been established from these two texts, the alternative approach of fideism must be regarded as unbiblical and insufficient for an effective approach to apologetic dialogue. Fideism is not a biblical approach toward justification of faith. In fact, in its efforts to protect faith from scepticism, it has conceded the logical conclusion of scepticism which undermines the fundamental truth claims of Christianity. Though all this does not mean that there are not some redeeming features within Fideism. There are aspects within Fideism that are important to the whole task of Christian apologetics. However, the fundamental core beliefs of Fideism still are incompatible and detrimental to Christian belief and understanding of God and his work.

When considering the role of logical argument, persuasion and evidence in Christian apologetics, with reference to Matthew 22, John 5, Acts 26 & Titus 1, it clearly demonstrated that the Gospel is not opposed to reason, draws upon rational argument, and is aimed at beings who are, for all their fallenness, still rational beings capable of comprehending truth and the principles of argumentation. Being rational beings are part of the essential nature of being human, being made in the image of God. Therefore, when all seemingly intellectual issues and objections have been shown to be logically and evidentially lacking, a person therefore has no choice but to follow the argument to its logical conclusion. This is where the issue of the mind is now the issue of the heart as the message of the Gospel is the only factor that may then change the human heart.

Chapter 5. Bibliography

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