



THE BEREA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

On Diligent Study

At right, I include part of this statement by J. W. McGarvey: “Moreover, the disciples had constant use in their disputations with the Jews for the genealogy of Jesus and this furnished a special call for some aid to the memory in this case.”

He continues: “If it be objected . . . that such a purpose could not justify a mode of writing which would puzzle Bible readers of subsequent ages, we reply that none are puzzled who approach the subject aright, and that God has seen fit to so construct the Bible as to call forth the best efforts of its readers in seeking to understand some of its parts. That he is wise in doing so is seen in the fact that such efforts are highly beneficial to those who make them, securing a blessing to every diligent student of the Bible which well repays him for all his toil.” ~ J. W. McGarvey, *Matthew and Mark* (Gospel Light), 19-20

Podcast Interview

I was recently invited to join hosts John White and Casey McDonald on the “Outside the Walls” podcast produced by the West Side church in Searcy (on podcast platforms and You Tube, [here](#)). We discussed questions related to my book, *Getting Acquainted with the Bible*.

Defending From the New Testament

David Anguish

Dr. Allison Trites, Distinguished New Testament Professor, Emeritus, at Acadia Divinity College (Wolfville, Nova Scotia; bio [here](#)), examined the legal scenes and language in Acts and concluded,

The Book of Acts shows tremendous interest in the idea of witness. . . . The facts of the Christian faith are being presented in an atmosphere of hostility, contention and debate. Each side ‘alleges’ its case is true and ungainsayable (... xxiv 9; ...xxv 19).

The frequent use of legal language in connection with real courts of law is germane to Luke’s presentation and part of his theological intention. The claims of Christ are being debated, and Luke intends by the use of lawcourt scenes and legal language to draw attention to this fact. . . . An important part of his task is the presentation of the courtroom evidence in such a way that it will bear witness to Christ.¹

F. F. Bruce began his book on the defense theme by saying, “Christian witness in the New Testament called repeatedly for the *defence* [sic] of the gospel against opposition of many kinds—religious, cultural and political.”² He included chapters on their defense against unbelieving Jews, paganism, and the Roman empire, as well as one on the response to the Christian deviations of legalism, ascetic gnosticism, antinomian gnosticism, and docetism.

Many may not have noticed this emphasis or considered its implications, in part, we suspect, because the New Testament is not written like a modern Christian Evidences text. But once alerted to the possibility of the theme’s presence, we begin to see that every part of the New Testament—and most of its individual books—include material that would have facilitated a defense against the challenges they faced.³

Besides Acts, examples include Paul’s defense against the claim that the widespread Jewish rejection of the gospel

A Significant Shift

“Whereas an existentialist will say to the Christian, ‘You are too restrictive on sexual ethics! You must allow each person to determine sexual behavior through his or her own authentic choices—and nothing more,’ the postmodernist will say, ‘Christian ethics is fine for the Christian community. However, do not try to make them applicable outside of your community. Each community determines its own ways.’ One may keep Christian morals so long as they are demystified and disinfected of any residual absolutism.”

~ Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (InterVarsity Press, 2000), 193

Culturally Challenged

“It might be that one of the reasons there is so little in the way of shared norms in our society is that our shared mode of knowledge, television, works against the communication of norms. A culture that is rooted more in images than in words will find it increasingly difficult to sustain any broad commitment to any truth, since truth is an abstraction requiring language.”

~ Kenneth A. Myers, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture* (Crossway Books, 1989), 164

* Note: this was written before the advent of the internet & social media.

On My Website

Recent additions to the [Sermons and Class Notes](#) page on my website are three lessons related to the gospel of Mark:

- Introducing the Gospel of Mark
- “What Sort of Man Is This?” (1.1-3)
- Introducing the Son of Man

meant God’s word to Israel had failed (Rom 9.6ff.-11.36); his rejoinders to Judaizers (Gal, Phil 3; etc.); appeal to the Thessalonians to “prove all things” (1 Thess 5.21); and defense of Jesus’ preeminence (Col). Elsewhere, Hebrews defends the better way of Christ versus Judaism; John’s epistles defend the reality of the historical Jesus; and Jude calls on readers to contend for the once-for-all-delivered faith against false teachers.

As for the gospels, John wrote so people might believe (20.31) and Luke wanted his readers to “have certainty” about the teaching (1.4). Neither Mark nor Matthew have explicit purpose statements, but both include material that would have been useful for “making a defense” (1 Pet 3.15). For example, Matthew explains the origin of the allegation that the disciples had stolen Jesus’ body (“spread among the Jews to this day”—Matt 28.11-15). See also the genealogy which, as J. W. McGarvey noted, would have “had constant use [by the disciples] in their disputations with the Jews.”⁴

But knowing the New Testament includes this theme is not merely a good addition to our accumulated Bible knowledge. We also face an “atmosphere of hostility, contention and debate” and need good resources to facilitate a defense. While grateful for the insights of the authors of apologetics survey texts and monographs, there is much to gain from close study and reflection on what the first disciples did to answer the opposition in their world, one much like our own.

There is also the matter of taking seriously the promise of 2 Timothy 3.16-17. The God-breathed word has been given “so that” (ἵνα, *hina*) we may be “equipped for every good work.” Would that not include the work of defending what we affirm?

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Notes

¹ Allison A. Trites, “The Importance of Legal Scenes and Language in the Book of Acts,” *Novum Testamentum* 16 (1974): 278, 284. Trites also co-authored (with Lothar Coenen) the article, “Witness, Testimony,” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, ed. Colin Brown (Zondervan, 1978), 1038-1051.

² F. F. Bruce, *The Defense of the Gospel in the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Eerdmans, 1977), vii.

³ A concordance search for the words for “witness” reveals they are used most often in Acts and John, but also appear in seventeen of the remaining books (noun μάρτυς; *martyrs* [Acts 1.8]; and verbs μαρτυρέω, *martyreō*; μαρτύρομαι, *martyromai*; διαμαρτύρομαι, *diamartyromai*).

⁴ J. W. McGarvey, *Matthew and Mark*, The New Testament Commentary, Vol. 1 (Chase & Hall, 1875; repr. Gospel Light Publishing, n. d.), 19.

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