

Lesson 1. A Firm Foundation

Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you (1Pet.3:15).

A life of obedience to the Bible is like a house built on a firm foundation. At the close of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said:

Therefore every one who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock; And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall; for it had been founded upon the rock. And every one who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall (Matt. 7:24-27).

Jesus pointed to the obvious fact that the strength of a foundation determines the ability of a house to withstand heavy rains and strong winds. If a man builds his house on sand, it will fall; but if he builds his dwelling on solid rock, it will stand secure even in a fierce storm. In these lessons, we will seek to build a house. And, as the rains and winds of unbelief assault our house, we will rest assured knowing that our groundwork is the solid rock of the Word of Christ.

Yet, even before we can lay a foundation, it is best to know what sort of "house" we are going to build. Let us, then, begin with this basic consideration.

A. The "House of Apologetics"

The term "apologetics" is often misunderstood. Usually it brings to mind the times when we wronged a friend or loved one and found it necessary to return to him saying "I'm sorry." Though this is the way "apology" is used in ordinary conversation, it will be used in a more restricted, technical sense in these lessons. The word "apologetics" is within a family of related words (apology, apologize, etc.) derived from the Greek APOLOGIA, a word which is used quite often in pagan and Christian literature and in the New Testament itself. The *Apology of Socrates* is an account of the *defense* which he offered before the court of Athens. Justin Martyr, in his *Apology*, sought to *defend* his fellow Christians against the false accusations which were hurled at them by the unbelieving world. When Paul stood before the mob in Jerusalem, he said, "hear my *defense* (APOLOGIA) which I now offer to you" (Acts 22:1). To "apologize," in this sense means to offer a defense; an "apology" is a defense offered; and "apologetics" is the study which pertains directly to the development and use of a defense.

In one way or another, apologetics is an area of concern for many religions and philosophies in the world. Yet, in these lessons attention will be given only to the defense of Christian truth as it has been revealed to man in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. This sort of apologetics is called "Christian apologetics" for it is "the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of non-Christian philosophy of life."¹ We are not concerned with apologetics in general but with apologetics of a particular sort. To put it in terms of the analogy used previously, the house which we are seeking to build in these lessons is the house of Christian apologetics.

B. The Meaning of "Biblical Apologetics"

When Jesus spoke of the sure foundation which should lie beneath every area of our lives, He had something particular in mind. He said that the only foundation which can give us the strength needed to withstand the raging storms of sin and

¹Cornelius Van Til, *Apologetics* (Class syllabus), p. 1.



Figure 1

destruction is His Word. The Scripture of the Old and New Testaments is the very Word of God. It is the common confession of all Christians that:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (II Tim. 3:16, 17).

The Bible is the absolutely authoritative guide for all believers; without it we are left merely guessing at God's mind, but with it God's directives for all areas of our lives are made certain and clear. So with the Psalmist we may say:

Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path (Ps. 119:105).

It was in this way that Jesus referred to His spoken word which confirmed the written Word at every point as the very foundation upon which we must build. The Bible is the foundation without which all our endeavors will crumble into ruin (see Fig. 1).

It is not a complete picture to say that the Bible acts merely as a foundation for apologetics, for even the inexperienced believer can see that its authority is one of the most important of his beliefs in need of defense. A great many attacks on the Christian faith are aimed at the Bible. The Bible is often accused of containing errors and having little or no more authority than any other writing. Because it is often necessary to defend belief in the Scriptures, the relation of apologetics to the Bible is sometimes

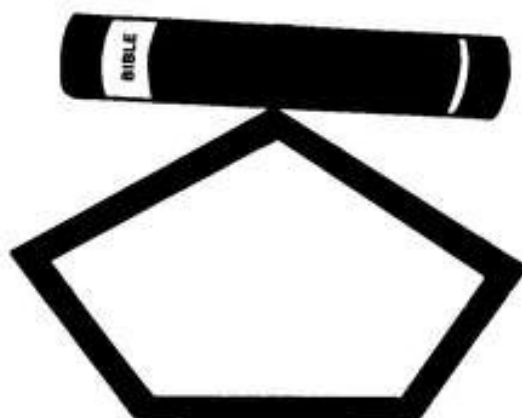


Figure 2

misunderstood. The Bible is both the foundation upon which our defense must be built and one of our beliefs which must be defended. All too often, this twofold role which the Bible must play is forgotten. Well-meaning Christians lose sight of the foundational character of the Bible and tend to build their defense on mere human wisdom and reasoning. The Word is placed, as it were, on the roof of their structure and is supported by apologetics. Yet, the difficulty of supporting the Scriptures with a structure resting on human wisdom as its ultimate authority often becomes too great. The builders of such a house may close their eyes and claim otherwise, but destruction is as inevitable for that house as for a house built on sand (see Fig. 2).

As followers of Christ, we must remember always to build our defense of the Christian faith on the sure foundation of the Bible. If we do so, there will be no weight too great to be supported; no wind too strong to be resisted.

Biblical apologetics can be compared, therefore, to the relation of a king and his generals. It is clearly the generals' responsibility to defend their king, even as apologetics defends the Bible. Yet, it is equally true that honorable generals defend their king according to the commands and directives of the king himself. Even so, apologetics must defend the Bible while submitting entirely to the defensive principles and directives revealed there.

This guiding role of the Bible for apologetics can be seen clearly