

TTS Scripture – Apologetics: Witnessing to the World

NOTES

Welcome to TTS Scripture!

- Thanks for coming.
- Thanks to MHEC for hosting.

Let's get the boring stuff out the way first!

- **FIRST: Who are we?**
 - **DISCUSS:** You first!
 - What's your name, Church (etc.)?
 - **About TTS itself:**
 - Name comes from a couple of places – Packer + Paul.
 - Small, Chester-based organisation – Christ-centred.
 - Focus so far on 'Foundations' sessions – Nicene.
 - **Wider support:**
 - A core team providing support and wisdom.
 - Coverage from three Chester Churches.
 - Fiona Graham – an accomplished Bible teacher.
 - **About myself:**
 - Married to Jo.
 - Academic background.
- **SECOND: How will this session work?**
 - **Couple of practical details:**
 - To finish around 6.15pm.
 - Notes provided for free tomorrow – re: WEBSITE!
 - **Three key principles for all TTS sessions:**
 - [A] *"The Scriptures cannot be broken..."* [John 10:35]
 - [B] *"Will not the judge of all heaven and earth do right?"* [Gen 18:25]
 - [C] *"Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour"* [Rom 12:10]
 - **At the heart of all TTS sessions:**
 - *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind"* [Matt 22:37]
 - Any time we 'do' theology – it's not primarily a **studious** act, it's a **worshipful** one.

[1] God's People – Living in a Changed and Changing World

Idea for today's session came from a question I asked Church leaders: "What should we look at? What would be helpful to God's people?"

Answer: **apologetics** – knowing how to respond to a changed world.

[1A] After all, it can sometimes feel like society is going 1000mph.

- **Let me describe state of society,¹ see if this rings any bells!**
 - We're enjoying an unprecedented period of peace:²
 - Global skirmishes, but no threat to our existence.
 - There's some memory of having a big Empire.³
 - However, despite prosperity, there's much political unrest:
 - Wars are fought in foreign lands against forces that want to destroy our way of life.⁴
 - 'Background noise' of populism, against ruling class.⁵
 - Unsurprisingly, focus on welfare and entertainment.⁶
 - It's a period of massive social change:
 - The population is growing very rapidly.⁷
 - Technology is advancing and city life dominates.
 - It's also a period of huge moral + cultural transformation:
 - Immigrants from diverse lands coming into society.
 - Sex and sexuality are now a major focus of society.
 - Polyamory, same-sex love, widespread porn.
 - The Church in this society faces challenges on all sides:
 - Ever-increasing state hostility and discrimination.
 - Rise of false teaching from within, and a number of competing religious claims from without.⁸

This no doubt sounds very familiar to us! Indeed, you'd be forgiven for thinking that I've just described British society – the society we are called to witness to in 2019.

¹ What is the foil here? The reign of Marcus Aurelius [161-180AD] – the last of the 'five good emperors'.

² The so-called *pax Romana* – or 'Roman peace', which lasted from 27BC-180AD.

³ The last great expansion of Rome's imperial borders under Trajan [98-117AD].

⁴ I.e. the Marcomannic wars that Aurelius waged against the Germanic 'barbarians' [166-180AD].

⁵ Referring to the *Populares* – the political faction of the Roman Republic between 133-121BC.

⁶ The infamous palliative of *panem et circenses* – 'bread and circuses', attributed to Roman poet Juvenal.

⁷ The population of the empire ballooned during the *pax Romana* – c.10m in 0AD, to 70m under Aurelius.

⁸ From within: e.g. Gnosticism, Docetism, Montanism, etc. From without: e.g. mystery + imperial cults, etc.

[1B] AND YET – I’ve actually just described Roman society in 180AD!

- **This was the ‘changed and changing world’ ancient Christians called to witness to – just as we are called to ours.**
 - There are obvious similarities (though also flattened out!):
 - Political discontent in a period of peace.
 - Social and technological change.
 - Cultural and moral transformation.
 - An increasingly hostile state and society.
 - Challenges from within and without the Church.
- **What’s my point here, beyond pointing out some historical similarities?**
 - We’re called to witness to a changed and changing world.
 - BUT we can easily miss the pace + depth of changes.
 - Not only not our parents’ / grandparents’ world – it’s not even the same world *I* grew up in!
 - (Re: *Little Britain* 2008 sketch – “rubbish transvestite Emily Howard”.)
 - → MANCHESTER PASSION 06 VIDEO ←

[1C] We must come to terms with this changed and changing world.

- **The statistics make for upsetting reading (cf. Steve Bruce):**
 - In 1851, between 40-60% of GB attended Church.
 - In 1979 – 12% / in 1989 – 10% / in 1999 – under 8%
 - In 1980s – C of E lost 24%, Methodists almost 50%.
- **Some ‘hot off the press’ statistics are also concerning:**
 - From *British Religion in Numbers*:
 - Spring 2018: 57% say religion unimportant to them.
 - Feb 2019: only 7% would consult religious leaders.
 - March 2019: just 26% agree Jesus died + resurrected.
 - April 2019: ONS release local stats on religion.
 - *England*: ‘none’ 37.3% / Christian 51.7%.
 - *Wales*: ‘none’ 46.3% / Christian 49.1%.
 - *Scotland*: ‘none’ 50% / Christian 45.4%.
 - *Britain*: ‘none’ 38.8% / Christian 51.1%.
- **The picture’s not ALL doom and gloom:**
 - Cathedral attendance // Growth of conservative, Evangelical + Charismatic Churches (e.g. FIEC 2017 report – 56% growth) // Pew Global 19 – most in UK support a greater amount of religious influence on society // the explosion of Christianity in East + Southern hemisphere.

[2] Apologetics – Knowing the Times and Seasons

So our changed and changing world is more like that of the early Christians than it is like the world of our childhood.

BUT LOOK: 1 Pet 1:13-16

The danger for us here (and for me!) is to wallow in the bad news.

Scripture's challenge: don't conform, but "*rejoice in hope*" [Rom12:12].

[2A] The Task of Apologetics

- **There's also another challenge that Peter gives in the same letter, one that's especially relevant here.**
 - **LOOK:** 1 Pet 3:14-16
 - **DISCUSS:** Thoughts and impressions?
- **"Don't conform"! "Rejoice!" AND "Be ready to respond!"**
 - This is otherwise known as 'apologetics'.
 - (NOT saying sorry all the time!)
 - From the Greek word ἀπολογία (*apologia* [appo-log-eah])
 - I.e. 'defence', 'answer', 'account'.
 - **LOOK:** Acts 22:1 – Paul before the Tribune.
- **Historically, apologetics has usually taken on more of an intellectual 'hue' – a subset of theology proper.**
 - **LOOK:** 2 Cor 10:3-5
 - "*We destroy arguments*" / "*Take every thought captive*"
 - Indeed, many famous theologians were also apologists:
 - Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian.
 - Augustine and Aquinas.
 - Lewis (PoPain / 4L / Chron / MereC) and Chesterton.
 - How theology is done impacts how apologetics is done:
 - Classical / Evidential / Presuppositional (Etc.)
- **In recent years, Christian apologetics has thrived:**
 - Just some of the major figures:
 - William Dembski / WLC / Ravi Zacharias / Douglas Groothuis / Gary Habermas / James White / David Robertson / Scott Bahnsen / Philip Yancey / Mike Licona / Lee Strobel
 - An online subculture:
 - [1] bethinking.org / [2] solas-cpc.org / [3] tektonics.org / [4] christianthinktank.org / [5] carm.org / [6] str.org / [7] answering-islam.org / [8] reasonablefaith.org / [9] aomin.org / [10] risenjesus.com / [11] probe.org

[2B] Apologetics – Witnessing to a Changed and Changing World

- **BUT – the danger here is that we turn apologetics into a primarily *adversarial* and *intellectual* activity...**
 - **LOOK AGAIN:** 1 Pet 3:14-16
 - *“Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated”* – in all our interactions, we’re never JUST engaging with ideas.
 - *“[But] in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord”* – in all our interactions, God’s ALWAYS more interested in our hearts.
 - *“Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you the hope that is in you”* – this might be intellectual, but it might also be relational.
 - *“[Yet] do so with gentleness and reverence”* – where so many struggle! (Certainly I did as a young Christian!)
- **Paul’s address at the Areopagus is very helpful here – an apostolic example of ‘apologetics in action’.**
 - **LOOK:** Acts 17:16-34 – **DISCUSS:** Thoughts? Impressions?
 - *ON ONE HAND:* doesn’t shrink from the whole gospel.
 - *OTHER:* uses familiarity with Gk culture for Christ.
 - **LOOK:** 1 Cor 9:19-23 – all things for all people.
 - (RE: MLJ – can’t JUST retreat into the old)

KEY POINT:

Apologetics isn’t primarily about challenging non-Christians to a game of ‘intellectual chess’ (though that’s sometimes necessary!) – it’s about God’s people knowing the times and seasons and being able to witness to a changed and changing world.

The 200 Issachar chiefs who *“had understanding of the times”* [1Ch 12]
 Daniel + friends, taught in Godly wisdom and Chaldean culture [Dan 1]
 With Jesus, we want to *“interpret the signs of the times”* [Matt 16:3]
 With Paul, we want to live *“not as unwise people but as wise”* [Eph5:15]

This will sometimes mean responding to objections.

This will sometimes mean being ready to give your testimony.

This will sometimes mean administering the wisdom of God.

This will sometimes mean answering a friend’s / colleague’s sincere question – knowing what to say, how to say, and when (not) to say it.

[3] Apologetics for a Changed and Changing World

DISCUSS: What does it mean to witness to Christ in 21st Cent Britain? I'd again suggest that we must come to terms with the fast changes. Not just in the ways described before – i.e. belief, culture, morality, etc.

But generationally – apologetics just isn't the same now. [Crude!]

- Silent Generation [-1940/45]:
 - *A wartime generation.*
 - Inheritors of a Victorian consensus.
- Baby Boomer Generation [1945-60/65]:
 - *A peacetime generation.*
 - Sexual and cultural revolution.
- Generation X [1965-80/85]:
 - *A questioning generation.*
 - Post-modern, anti-consumerist, nihilistic.
- Generation Y [1985-2000/05]:
 - *A conformist generation.*
 - Pursuit for 'authenticity', reacts against cynicism of X.
- Generation Z [2005+]:
 - *A de-centralised generation.*
 - Digital natives, more socially con, internet culture.

Who are the 'gatekeepers' right now? Boomers, Gen X + Gen Y.

- A. Baby Boomer: traditional OR New Atheism.
 - a. E.g. Dawkins, Hitchens, Dennett, etc.
- B. Gen X: New Age spirituality + philosophical revisionist.
 - a. E.g. Brand, Rogan, Peterson.
- C. Gen Y + Z: traditionalism OR 'illiterate ambivalence'.
 - a. Various YouTube personalities, internet subcultures, etc.

In order to sharpen our own understanding (and to practice some apologetics for ourselves!) – we're going to watch three videos that broadly correspond with these three generational responses to the Christian faith.

FIRST: Gervais on Stephen Colbert Show [7.1m views / 6.2m subs]

SECOND: Brand on Rogan + Huff [3.9m views / 5.3m subs]

THIRD: Gus Johnson on H3 podcast [654k views / 1.1m subs]

[3A] Ricky Gervais on Stephen Colbert

- “Why is irrelevant” – the question of meaning / scientism.
- Definition of atheism – atheism and other religions.

[3B] Brand on Rogan and Huff

- Reductive approach to God (love + consciousness) + Jesus.
- Use of drugs + sex for transcendence – ALSO against doctrine.

[3C] Gus Johnson on H3H3 podcast

- Christian hypocrisy and the search for authenticity.
- Ethan (forgiveness) and Gus (LGBT) and Biblical illiteracy.
- Importance of Christian family + community.

[4] Conclusion

The world is dramatically different – but we’re given three commands: [1] Don’t conform! [2] Rejoice in hope! [3] Be ready to respond!

This is called apologetics – being able to give an account to the world. How does our changed and changing world respond to the Christian message? Even this aspect is in flux. Whereas once it was popular for Christians to object to society’s view of truth as ‘relative’, younger generations certainly *talk* as if truth is absolute. Their view of the world, however, is increasingly Biblically illiterate – they simply do not operate using Biblical or Christian logic, and they are increasingly sensitive to ‘secular’ political ideas.

Nevertheless, this changed and changing world is *our* world – God has (by his providence) put us here, ‘for such a time as this’. We must be ready to give an account for the hope that is within us.

What can we do to get better at apologetics? To witness to this world? *First*, I can recommend some good resources – take a look at the links provided earlier. (Also feel free to get in touch for book / YouTube suggestions.) *Second*, we shouldn’t be afraid of anything – we need to ask questions. *Third*, if indeed our world is like theirs (as we described before), we can learn from our second-century brothers and sisters.

The following is a quote from *The Epistle to Diognetus*, which was written in the second century. Although we're unsure about the exact identity of the author, the recipient (Diognetus) was the tutor of Marcus Aurelius – the same Emperor whose society we described earlier!

“For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, **they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life.**

They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. **Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers.** They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonoured, and yet in their very dishonour are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honour; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet

those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.

To sum up all in one word — what the soul is in the body, Christians are in the world. The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, yet is not of the body; and **Christians dwell in the world, yet are not of the world**" [*Epistle to Diognetus* V-VI]

The second-century Christians were able to navigate and respond to the world around them, despite the challenges. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and other Church fathers all wrote apologetic works; they were familiar with the pagan culture, and they could 'give an account for the hope that was within them'. They did this *not* because they compromised, but precisely *because* they were so different. They were almost stubbornly weird.

The statistical data suggests that conservative Churches grow, where liberal Churches do not. Churches that focus on Word and Spirit grow, where others do not. Churches that focus on discipleship – on being conformed to the counter-cultural image of Christ – experience growth, whereas those that focus primarily on appealing to the world do not.

My suggestion? In order to witness to a changed and changing world, we must 'lean in' to our weirdness. Our distinctiveness. Our holiness. More than half the work of Church apologetics is sanctifying Christ as Lord in our own hearts and lives – indeed, **the Church can only truly serve the world if the world truly has the Church.**