



2022-23

MBAN JOURNAL AND DIRECTORY

The Missouri Baptist Apologetics Network is a group of church leaders committed to the defense of the Christian faith and called to equip believers to more effectively share their faith.



Learn more at mobaptist.org/mban





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A MESSAGE FROM MBAN PRESIDENT WIL HOFFMANN

Whenever I'm asked if apologetics is needed today for the church, my answer is always, "Yes, absolutely." Frankly, I believe it's needed more than ever in today's church and the culture in which the church finds itself.

As the culture seems to move away from biblical foundations, sometimes our churches need a refresher on the importance of apologetics, which may be defined simply as a reasonable defense of the Christian faith. Fortunately, Missouri has a great group of men and women who have felt the call to defend the faith and to stand on the front lines of the battle. We are not just a group of men and women that like to get into arguments. We genuinely love God, God's Word, and God's people.

The Missouri Baptist Apologetics Network (MBAN) wants to help Missouri Baptist churches defend the faith in Jesus Christ. Pastors, teachers, and laymen make up our network, with specialties ranging from family worship to interacting with cult members who may show up at your door.

I've had the pleasure to be the president of MBAN for the past three years. During that time, I've been able to see the passion our network members have to strengthen the faith of Missouri Baptists to hold to the truths found in the words of Scripture.

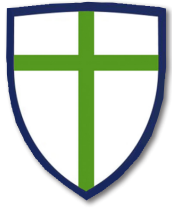
In this journal, we are introducing you to four network members who share their passion for Christian apologetics. I encourage you to read their journal entries, to explore the brief biographies of all MBAN members, and to call on us if we can help you and your church defend the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).



Wil R. Hoffmann

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Auxvasse, Mo.*

President, Missouri Baptist Apologetics Network



The Angry Atheist Who Became a Christian Apologist

By Roger Sherrer



In 2009, in the cafeteria of Lebanon (Mo.) High School, a confident and crass sixteen-year-old Roger Sherrer (that's me) sat at a table locked into yet another debate on religion. When it came to this topic, I spoke with a similar confidence that Colonel Sanders would have when speaking about chicken, or Michael Jordan would have when it came to a discussion on jump shots.

Even though I despised Christianity and all it stood for, I knew its principles and precepts. I

also knew what many students my age did not: what I saw to be the ugliness of the worldview they espoused. Growing up in a nonreligious household, my disdain for religion began in middle school and significantly heightened as I entered high school. By the time I was a junior, my atheism evolved into anti-theism. It wasn't enough to not believe in God; those who believed in him were stuck in the dark ages, and it was my duty to guide them into sanity. This particular day in the cafeteria was no different than many that had gone before it.

As I spoke to a Christian who was upset that I belittled her belief in God as “Santa Claus for adults,” she asked a question I had heard all too often: “But what if you’re wrong, Roger?”

I smirked and responded, “If I’m wrong, then at least I didn’t dedicate my life to a God who endorsed beating your slave as your property.” Her eyes grew big and her voice turned defensive: “My God does not endorse that, and you do not know Christianity, Roger.”

At that moment, I knew I had won the debate. I reached into my backpack and pulled out a free Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) Bible that I had grabbed at an after-school event. It was a Bible I had studied all too much, albeit mostly the Old Testament. I quickly turned to Exodus 21: “Anyone who beats their male or female slave with a rod must be punished if the slave dies as a direct result, but they are not to be punished if the slave recovers after a day or two, since the slave is their property.”

I remember the look in her eyes as if it were yesterday. It was as if she just found out her father was arrested for murder. This girl, born into a church-going family, hadn’t missed a Sunday service. And she had been a leader in FCA since sixth grade. For the first time, I could see that her whole worldview had been shaken by one simple verse. The house of cards was crumbling, and I had never felt more victorious. A true evangelical warrior for atheism had prevailed!

This interaction for me was not an anomaly. I spent years in high school interrogating, attacking, and even de-converting Christians from following Jesus Christ and, in return, allowing them to see the light of reason. My secularism was no secret, and I would often find myself going to Wednesday evening youth services at surrounding churches and an occasional Sunday morning service just to

see what was being preached and taught.

One thing was always noticeably absent: the presence of apologetics. My fellow students, gleefully on fire for the gospel and willing to do anything to defend it, were being equipped with rubber knives. Meanwhile, I was tactfully waiting with a fully armored tank. Students may have been doing an adequate job understanding the Gospels and applying the parables, but when it came to responding to slavery in the Old Testament, or why their family members were dying of cancer, I saw from the outside looking in that the responses of local church members were woeful.

As the “community atheist” and as a wolf, I never let these opportunities go to waste. The end result, too many times then and now, is that students are talked out of their faith because they have never truly been talked into their faith.

Since then, by the complete grace of God, I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ in November of that same year (2009) and now have the opportunity to minister to students on both sides of the cafeteria conversation that occurred back then.

As a youth pastor, I seldom preach a sermon on a Wednesday night without mentioning my past life as an atheist in middle school and high school. It breaks my heart when I have students after service come up to me privately and whisper, “Can I talk to you? I’m having doubts.” The fact that they are having doubts isn’t what causes my heart to break; that’s all a part of the process. It’s the fact that so many students are either afraid or ashamed to bring up their doubts, curiosities, concerns, or questions.

Similarly, I’ve had conversations with former youth students who have graduated high school and have come back from college with the tragic news that they were reconsidering

their Christian faith altogether. When their parents respond in absolute shock, I sometimes want to ask, “Why? Why does this surprise you?”

What I have found in my brief time in ministry is that we have a generation that we as mature believers have tragically failed. In Matthew 22, Jesus declares, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” As an adult, I firmly believe we have failed this generation in teaching them to love God with all their minds, and that is a hill I’m willing to die on. Now, more than ever, students and young adults are leaving the faith in droves. Perhaps even more startling, adults are standing right next to them with their hands in the air asking what went wrong.

Having had many difficult conversations with these students, I find that too many times they have concluded that their problems are inescapable. They have these conclusions with the best of intentions, but earnestly do not know that a Christian response is available.

Take, for example, the false dichotomy of “religion vs. science” or “reason vs. faith” that is peddled across every media platform, college campus, and television station in America. Can I be religious and scientific? Can I be faithful and reasonable? As apologetically minded believers, these types of dilemmas don’t seem like dilemmas at all. In fact, they insult our intelligence.

But think for a moment of young believers who have truly never been given the tools on how to maximally love God with their minds. To go up against an atheistic college professor, who is statistically five times more likely to be more atheist than the general public, is to go into a warzone with a rubber knife. The end result can be an abandonment of a lifelong child-like faith in Jesus for an immature anger towards organized religion – all because we assume

it’s enough to give them a Bible and pray for them. To love them is to equip them, and to equip them is to prepare them to always have an answer.

Not only will this equip them with the armor of God, but it will also revolutionize their faith and personalize it in ways they never thought possible. The miracle of Christian apologetics in youth ministry that I have experienced is getting to see a student’s faith separate from their parents’ beliefs and become their own intimate faith in Jesus. There is nothing that can replace that.

As students today share their faith in public schools and universities, they are finding relativism and atheism far more common than the atheism I espoused in 2009. Back then, I became a local celebrity because my atheistic beliefs were so radical and yet so rare. In 2022, Roger Sherrer would just be another face in the crowd. As a matter of fact, there would probably be a club of countless other students embracing the same level of disdain for those who choose to publicly follow Christ.

For some within Christianity, the response can be to sit and complain about atheism and its vocality in our culture. While this response is almost always easier, I firmly believe God has molded this moment in our world as a moment for this young generation to step up, ready to defend the gospel as boldly and with as much confidence as ever before.

That’s why, when I’m preaching to a group of students, I don’t want to stop with religious presuppositions. I want them to seek God through the beauties of history, philosophy, science, ethics, and so on. Here’s the good news of that: students want it. They are not apathetic or lethargic when it comes to defending their faith, and they are ready and willing to use the tools given. It’s now up to us.

Last year, I wanted to share my passion in

apologetics by hosting a small group with students and young adults that would meet once a week. When I announced that I would be leading it, I had a fellow adult in the church ask, “Is there really an interest in apologetics?”

The fact is, many church members would struggle to define what the word even means, let alone have a passion for it. My “wait and see” approach worked, as by the second week of the small group, we had standing room only and had to move to a coffeeshop due to size limitations. What many learned confirmed what I knew to be true: These students had questions that, for some, had been boiling within them for far too long.

Some of their questions were simple, such as, “Why do we believe in the Trinity?” Others raised deep and difficult questions like, “Why didn’t God stop my dad from being hit by a drunk driver?” In one session, we talked about the Kalam Cosmological Argument for the existence of God and why the beginning of the universe gives us solid proof for a transcendent, personal creator. Afterwards, a nineteen-year-old girl came up to me and thanked me. “When the topic of science has come up since I’ve been a child, I’ve always been embarrassed. After tonight, I actually feel confident.”

On my bookshelf, I always keep two books to hand out to students at any given time: *The English Standard Version of the Bible* and *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* by Dr. Frank Turek and Dr. Norman Geisler. I not only want to normalize teaching apologetics to students on Wednesday nights, but I want to normalize teaching them how to use it in their gospel vocabulary. I have seen time and time again that students are on the defensive with their faith because they simply do not have answers.

Parents and church leaders, I think it’s time

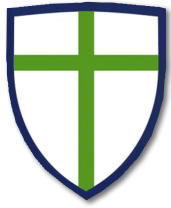
we start helping them be on the offensive. I say this not to teach them how to win debates or attack those who do not know Jesus, because I have yet to meet an atheist who has accepted Jesus because he has lost a debate. Similarly, Peter tells us to be prepared to offer a reason for the hope within us, but to also do so with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15).

As I complete my master’s degree in Christian Apologetics this fall from Liberty University, I have had more than one person ask me, “Why apologetics?” To some, apologetics can seem more like a hobby. In my life, apologetics has become more than a passion; it’s a calling. When I get to heaven someday, I want to be able to tell Jesus that I spent every single day trying to win young people to Jesus with every single tool that I had at my disposal.

It is my prayer that as parents and leaders, we do not sit on the sidelines any longer with folded arms as secularists seemingly win the intellectual debate with this generation. Now more than ever before in history, the church needs apologetics, and I, in good conscience, will do all that I can to make sure our students are well equipped to be defenders every single day.

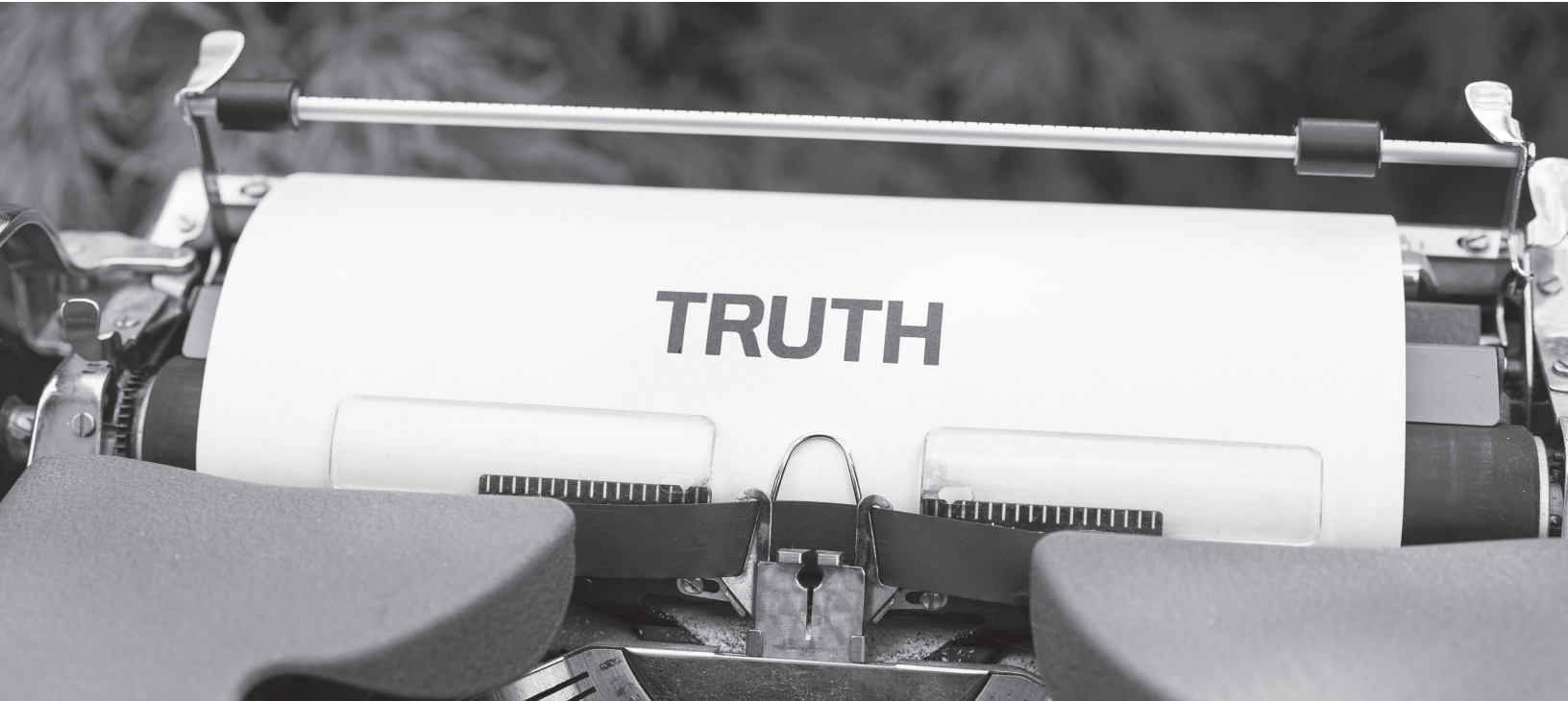


Roger Sherrer serves as youth pastor of First Baptist Church, Lebanon, Mo.



Is Christian Apologetics Needed for the Church?

By Hanna Sims



The following note was given to a Sunday school teacher from someone in her class: "I have believed and I'm struggling. I want to believe but it's hard [because] I'm thinking what if it's all just fake and some other religion is right instead."

What age do you think the writer of this note is? The answer: 5th grade.

How long do you think the church has to answer this girl's question and give her confidence that Christianity is true before her faith crumbles? The answer: not long, as a person's worldview is set between 12-14 years of age.¹

This means that the way a child makes sense of the world and answers the big questions in life – like, "Does truth exist?", "Is God real?", "Where do right and wrong come from?", "Is

Jesus God the Savior?" – has been decided before entering middle school.

What do you think is the key to answering these questions and setting the right worldview? It is not teaching more Bible stories or a list of "do's and don'ts." What must first be established with our young people is a footing of absolute truth. If the footing of truth is not established in the worldview of your children and teens, the foundation (like God, Jesus, the Bible, and the gospel) will eventually crumble away because those beliefs are often interpreted as mere preferences and opinions rather than undeniable facts.

Unfortunately, the footing of truth has been a neglected teaching in many churches' children and youth programs, which has been a large contributing factor to the mass crum-

bling of faith with our young people before and after they graduate high school.

Apologetics (teaching others why Christianity is true and how to defend/share that faith with others) is needed in the church for all ages. But it's especially needed for kids and teens to know that absolute truth exists. This, in turn, gives them confidence that the Bible is true so they believe what it says, trust in Jesus as their Savior, and walk in the way of truth, amidst a culture and an enemy that would try to dissuade them from it.

Our Culture is Post-Truth

In the past, one did not have to start with the basic principle that truth is absolute and describes reality because it was a natural part of our belief system. However, today's children are growing up in a post-truth culture. Post-truth means "emotions and personal beliefs are more important than objective facts."² It means that while people may acknowledge truth, they generally do not care about it if it gets in the way of their personal preferences.³ Feelings override truth.

There are 168 hours in our children's week, and they are constantly bombarded by messages of post-truth, like "share YOUR truth," "follow your heart," and "you do you." It is no wonder that when children spend maybe three hours a week at church (max!), they interpret what they hear at church through the filter of what they have learned from the culture. When the church teaches that the Bible is true or that Jesus is the Savior, the church says it with the mindset of teaching absolute truth. But, without that bedrock purposely established in children's lives, they will hear it as an opinion (or relative truth), which can easily be exchanged when something more favorable comes along that makes them feel better.

Satan wants kids to believe a counterfeit reality and to walk away from any truth that is being shared with them at church or by their Christian families. He wants people to believe lies about God and salvation in this life, so that they will be captive to him for eternity.

The heart of apologetics is the gospel; so one of the biggest reasons to do apologetics in the church is to remove mental stumbling blocks so people will believe the truth that Jesus is the Savior. After someone has made a personal decision to believe in Jesus, apologetics then helps that person stay steadfast in the truth, share the truth with others, and refute the lies or objections of those that might try to divert them from reality.

Instilling in the next generation the existence of absolute truth (versus relative truth) will determine how receptive they are to believing the gospel, biblical accounts, God's attributes, etc. It will also be the grounding to remind the kids that since truth *does* exist, people cannot believe whatever they want and it all be okay.

Children will hear a lot of things in life labeled as "truth," which are actually lies, and they need to learn how to discern truth from error because beliefs have consequences, for better or worse, affecting them and those around them, both now and into the future. Walking in the way of truth will bring blessing in a person's life, but making choices based on a lie results in wrong choices and ultimately leads to the way of death (Prov. 13:14; 14:12, 27, Rom. 6:23).

After establishing the footing of truth,⁴ the church can teach the evidence for Christianity, God, the Bible, etc. to help people know why these things are true (apologetics). Answering kids' questions about issues of faith is not so that they will feel good about believing what the church tells them, or believe like those around them. Their confidence in Christianity

should not be built on feelings, but on the solid bedrock of truth. Feelings change but facts do not. The church must continue to remind kids that Christianity is not a preference or personal belief; apologetics teaches children the unchanging reality of God's Word.

Past Casualties

The effects of a post-truth culture have been detrimental for our last generation of young Christians. Sixty-one percent of Millennials (those born between 1981 and 1996) who grew up in the church became spiritually disengaged by the time they finished college.⁵ They no longer went to church, prayed, or read their Bible. When Millennials are asked why they left the church, their answer is not because they did not have enough fun at church. They give reasons like believing there is more evidence for "science" than there is for the Bible to be true. They began to see Bible stories and miracles as fairy tales, or they felt people did not answer their questions about faith issues but just told them to keep believing.⁶ Basically, their main reason for leaving the faith is that they did not think there is enough evidence to show that Christianity is true.

You might think that their faith fell apart when they went to college, but Satan does not wait until a person is an adult to steal, kill, and destroy faith. Almost 40 percent of them had their first doubts in middle school, and some even as young as 10 years of age.⁷ This tells us that while our kids and teens are physically still in our church buildings, participating in Sunday school, AWANA, and youth camp, the footing of truth was not being built into their lives, and so their faith crumbled apart.

While time will tell what happens to the faith of our current generation of kids and teens, so far the signs are not good. Already, today's kids/teens are the largest group of religious

"nones," meaning they do not want to identify with any religion in particular.⁸

Maybe you have heard that those that do not learn from the past are doomed to repeat it. If the church does not want this current generation to repeat the crumbling faith of the past generation, then we need to intentionally establish the footing of absolute truth in their belief system, which is the purpose of apologetics. Right beliefs grounded in truth, instead of relativism and feelings, lead to right application, and then faith will not crumble regardless of the shifting lies of this culture.

How Can We Answer the Call to Apologetics for the Church?

Apologetics for the next generation is not just the responsibility of the pastor or church leaders. Apologetics also needs to be done by the church body. Any Christian that influences the next generation in any way is called to always be ready to have an answer for the hope that they have, and to do it with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15). The church is to be the watchman on the walls against the lies of Satan that would keep our kids from believing truth in the first place, or that would steal the seeds that have begun to grow in their hearts. Following are some general suggestions on how those in the church can put apologetics into practice.

1. Purposefully establish the footing of truth in the lives of your children and teens. Many pastors and Sunday school teachers have been faithful to teach that the Bible is true, but their teaching is interpreted as "relative" opinions instead of absolute, unchanging facts about reality. Before the church can teach what is true, the church must first teach that absolute truth exists because that is the footing for believing the foundational principles.

2. Prepare yourself. Research the answers

APOLOGETICS MINISTRIES

(ARTICLES, PODCASTS, VIDEOS, CONFERENCES, ETC.)

- Hanna Sims/NETworkers TEC - www.networkerstec.com/apologetics.html
- Yes, God is Real! Children's Apologetics Curriculum – teach.crossexamined.org
- Cold Case Christianity w/ J. Warner Wallace - www.coldcasechristianity.org
- Case Makers Academy for Kids - www.casemakersacademy.com
- Cross Examined w/ Frank Turek - www.crossexamined.org
- Stand to Reason w/ Greg Koukl - www.str.org
- Answers in Genesis – www.answersingenesis.org
- Mama Bear Apologetics – www.mamabearapologetics.com
- Genesis Apologetics – www.genesisapologetics.com
- So the Next Generation Will Know by J. Warner Wallace and Sean McDowell
- Author Lee Strobel - his "Case For..." Series for kids, students, and adults.
- How do you Know God is Real? by Kyle Butt (for kids)
- How do you Know the Bible is from God? by Kyle Butt (for kids)
- Saving Truth by Abdu Murray
- Worldview Camps for Teens - www.summit.org and www.worldview.org
- Biblical Worldview Trends and Statistics - www.arizonachristian.edu/culturalresearch-center/research/ and <https://frc.org/worldview>
- "What We Believe" Series from Apologia and Summit Ministries
- One Minute Apologist - www.oneminuteapologist.com
- Bible Q&A - www.gotquestions.org, www.412teens.org, www.gqkidz.org

to common questions or topics that kids or teens might bring up about Christianity or the Bible through reading, listening to podcasts, and studying apologetic topics. With another adult, role play conversations or discussions that you might have on these topics. These things require more preparation than just doing Bible story time or a craft, but your efforts will help keep the next generation steadfast in the truth.

3. Tell the truth even when it is unpopular. It is a disservice to our young people if we lie, twist, or mislead them in order to get them to like us or to conform to us rather than following God.

4. Give them evidence for why the Bible is true. Is it easier to believe something supported by real evidence or something that you are just told to have faith in? Of course, evidence helps give confidence in the truth. But since kids and teens do not often know the evidence for why the Bible is true, they see it as a nice story but not as actual history, which is one reason they think it is not true. So, consider what types of outside evidence you can incorporate to help them know that the Bible is real. This might include archeology, science, history, eyewitness testimony, logic, etc. Help them know not only that the Bible is true, but the WHY (evidence) behind the truth.

Conclusion

A home without the proper footing may appear stable at first, but the foundation will eventually crack because there is no footing. In the same way, the faith of our children needs to start with the footing of truth to keep the foundational teaching from crumbling away. Teaching apologetics in your church to the next generation is needed immediately in order to prepare their hearts for the message of salvation and to keep them grounded in their faith, once they have believed, in a world where Satan and this culture seek to dismantle it.

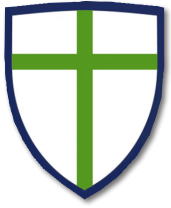
There is no greater joy than to know the children and youth of your church are walking in truth (3 John 4). Hurry — you only have a limited amount of time to influence them. Time is short, and the need is great!



Hanna Sims is a teacher and trainer with an emphasis on answering apologetics questions in the language of children. Her home church is Red Bridge Baptist Church in Kansas City, Mo.

Notes

1. <https://www.barna.com/research/research-shows-that-spiritual-maturity-process-should-start-at-a-young-age/>.
2. Post-truth was the word of the year in 2016. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016>.
3. <http://www.breakpoint.org/2018/10/breakpoint-saving-truth-in-a-post-truth-world/>.
4. Truth must exist, because to deny so is self-defeating. If the statement, "Truth does not exist," were "true," that would be a truth making the statement false, so the denial of truth defeats the very point it is trying to prove, demonstrating that truth does exist.
5. <https://answersingenesis.org/christianity/church/already-gone/>.
6. *So the Next Generation Will Know* by Sean McDowell and J. Warner Wallace, 42-43.
7. <https://answersingenesis.org/christianity/church/already-gone/>.
8. <https://www.barna.com/rise-of-atheism/>.



Apologetics and Family Worship

By Chris Bass



With an ever-increasing number of people “deconstructing” their faith and leaving the church, there has never been a more important time to “bring [children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4).¹ Millennial teens have grown up and their families are growing — but, their attendance and engagement in church are not.

Barna Research indicates that only 25 percent of Millennials attend church weekly.² They add that only 25 percent of all Americans identify themselves as “practicing Christians.” Each of these statistics was nearly double that just a few decades ago.

What happened?

Commentator Doug McIntosh asserts that “every generation is only twenty years away from barbarism.”³ His argument is connected to Psalm 78 and Deuteronomy 6, which instruct parents to take an active role in the spiritual training of their children. In Psalm 78 Asaph describes how the “praiseworthy acts of the Lord, his might, and the wondrous works he has performed” were not to be hidden, but told to “a future generation” (v. 4). He goes on to write, “[H]e commanded our ancestors to teach to their children so that a future generation — children yet to be born

— might know. They were to rise and tell their children so that they might put their confidence in God and not forget God's works, but keep his commands" (vv. 5–7).

In Deuteronomy 6, Moses urges the Israelites to internalize their faith, saying, "These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (vv. 6–7). Today we would say that "these words" should be known by heart. Their personal knowledge and understanding should then be passed on to their children, the goal of which is heart transformation and a deep love and obedience to God. He encourages believers to infuse discussion about God into every situation in life — sitting, walking, lying down, and getting up.

They are told to "repeat them." The original language depicts someone engraving or etching "these words" into stone. This would be a laborious endeavor, filled with painstaking hours of tedious effort, but the impact to the stone would last for generations. Using this picture, we can see that Moses tasked the Israelites with chiseling the commandments into the hearts of the next generation — making the message indelible through continual repetition.

The Bible is replete with direct and indirect calls for parents to teach the faith to their children.⁴ Yet, most parents spend more time teaching their children to be successful in every area of their lives except the spiritual. Voddie Baucham quipped, "If I teach my son to keep his eye on the ball but fail to teach him to keep his eyes on Christ, I have failed as a father."⁵

This leads to the answer to the "what happened" question. Why are large numbers of

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DEUTERONOMY 6-7

individuals leaving the church and the faith? One of the greatest reasons is the professionalization of the church and the release of parental responsibility. When the car needs repair, the mechanic is visited. When the showers don't work, the plumber is called. When children need spiritual training, they are taken to the children and youth pastors of the church.

Many parents have, without realizing it, relinquished their roles as the primary spiritual teachers for their children. This is not solely the fault of parents, as churches for decades have asked them to "leave your kids with us," and, sometimes, churches do not want or encourage the involvement of the parents. The sad reality is that even the best children and youth pastors will only have 156 hours a year to make an impact on a child.⁶

Parents' influence in the lives of their children is orders of magnitude greater than even the best children and youth pastors. Study after study — both secular and religious — reveal that parents are the number one influencer in the lives of their children.⁷ Working parents will spend more than 40 hours a week with their child — 2,080 hours in a year!⁸ Four out of five Christian teens say they can "share

honest questions, struggles, and doubts with their parents.”⁹ However, many parents do not take advantage of the opportunity and influence they have.

The Scriptures teach that parents are responsible for the spiritual growth and development of their children. Sadly, when families have been slow to train their children, the church has jumped in with structures and programs to fill the gap. In doing so, churches have confused the issue of who is responsible for the spiritual training of children.

What is the answer?

The simple answer is the reinstitution of family worship (also called family devotionals). Many Southern Baptist churches use J. Newton Brown’s church covenant from *A Declaration of Faith* written in 1853. One of the commitments in that covenant is to “maintain family and secret devotion” and “to religiously educate our children.”

Nevertheless, this important spiritual activity, typically, has been neglected in the pulpit. Parents know that they need to do something, but they are not sure exactly where to start — so, these activities are usually scarcely attempted.

History is teeming with examples of the early church encouraging its members in the practice of family worship. First-century church father, Clement of Rome (AD 30-100), exhorted men to guide their wives and children in the “true Christian training.”¹⁰ This idea of families worshipping together was something that was consistently taught in the early church. Families would meet twice a day to worship the Lord together – a brief time in the morning and then a longer period of time in the evening:

At an early hour in the morning the family was assembled, when a portion of the

Scriptures was read from the Old Testament, which was followed by a hymn and a prayer, in which thanks were offered up to the Almighty... In the evening, before retiring to rest, the family again assembled, when the same form of worship was observed as in the morning; with this difference, that the service was considerably protracted beyond the period which could be conveniently allotted to it in the commencement of the day.¹¹

The call to family worship continued in the second century with Clement of Alexandria (AD 153-217). He recommended that married couples begin the day with prayer and scripture reading.¹² Tertullian (AD 142-220) would write a letter titled *Ad uxorem* (to my wife), in which he describes the vital role family worship plays in the development of a family’s spirituality:

They pray together, they worship together, they fast together; instructing one another, encouraging one another, strengthening one another...they perform their daily exercises of piety without hindrance. Psalms and hymns they sing to one another, striving to see which one of them will chant more beautifully the praises of their Lord. Hearing and seeing this, Christ rejoices.¹³

This description is encouraging and challenging. It paints a beautiful picture of family worship in which family members are spurring each other on to greater levels of holiness. It also challenges families today to take up these critical spiritual practices. *The Apostolic Constitutions* confirm the emphasis on family worship encouraging parents to “teach your children the Word of the Lord.”¹⁴

In the middle ages, Caesarius of Arles, a bishop in southern Gaul in the sixth century, commanded families, “How much more, then,

**“...SWORN DUTY BEFORE GOD
TO SET THE GOSPEL BEFORE
THE ENTIRE FAMILY.”**

MARTIN LUTHER

should it not suffice for your spiritual profit that you hear the divine lessons in the church, but among your company at home you should engage in sacred reading, even several hours, at night, when the days are short.”¹⁵

During the Reformation, Martin Luther pushed for family worship, teaching that parents have a “sworn duty before God to set the gospel before the entire family.”¹⁶ He had such a high view of family worship that he thought it was more important than his sermons, saying, “Sermons very little edify children, who learn little thereby; it is more needful they be taught and well instructed...at home.”¹⁷

To aid fathers in family worship, reformers such as Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and Knox developed catechisms.¹⁸ These documents use a question-and-answer format to teach children the doctrines of the faith:

The Reformers, particularly Luther and Calvin, developed a robust vision for Christian training in the household and called parents to disciple their children. The Puritans in England and America cultivated this Reformation vision and brought it to its fullest flower in the form of consistent family worship and discipleship.¹⁹

It was from the Puritans that “the most mature expressions of the theology and practice of what came to be known as ‘family worship’ was developed.”²⁰

Richard Baxter, a seventeenth-century non-conformist pastor, had an interesting habit of visiting the homes of his parishioners and teaching the father to lead the family spiritually. Baxter spent much of his time training families in doctrine and testing them about its content. He believed it was the responsibility of fathers to train their children and review the material between his visits.²¹ He argues that this type of pastoral care is the best, most biblical, way to reach and train families.

In the more modern era, the prince of preachers, Charles Spurgeon, said:

Brethren, I wish it were more common, I wish it were universal, with all [Christians] to have family prayer.... In many, very many cases, I fear there is such a neglect of family worship that it is not probable that the children are at all impressed by any piety supposed to be possessed by their parents!²²

His argument was that faith was not important to the children because it was not important to their parents.

During that same period of time, J. H. Merle D’Aubigné bemoaned the fact that families help one another with all kinds of things that are unimportant, but do not think to help each other with the “one needful thing” — their faith in God.²³

Even with all this historical encouragement as an example, Barna Research has found that ten percent of parents who regularly attend church with their kids do not conduct regular devotions or have a “genuine spiritual life together.”²⁴ There is no time in the history of Christianity that someone, somewhere, was not encouraging families to come together to worship God with one another. The basic principles of this practice have been the same throughout the ages.

What do I do?

Until recently, the church has failed to recognize the struggling family in this area. Every writer on the subject of family worship offers a variety of activities to be included in family worship. All use a complex combination of the following: (1) read the Bible together; (2) pray together; (3) Sing psalms, hymns, or spiritual songs; (4) catechism in theological training; (5) read Christian books; and (6) a question-and-answer time.

All of these practices are wonderful. However, the larger issue is not what to include but how to begin. If asked, most parents know that they should be doing something spiritual with their families, but they do not know how to start. Most fathers feel that they are to offer their families something akin to a corporate worship service, or a Sunday school lesson, when they practice family worship. If family worship looks like corporate worship or Sunday school, then it is being practiced incorrectly. There is no need for it to be complex or complicated. Charles Spurgeon quipped, “Short prayers are long enough.”²⁵ I’d say that is true of family worship as well.

The best way to begin is to just begin. Gather the family in the living room or around the table and explain to them the importance of family worship and the desire to begin to practice it. Then begin with the basics: Bible reading, prayer, and singing. It’s as easy as that.

One positive outcome of family worship is the growth in the number of spiritual conversations that families have — typically tripling its current number.

What should I think?

Family worship is commanded by Scripture, commended by history, and should be championed in each home. As families add fami-

ly worship to their daily routine, they will see exponential growth in the ability of all family members to know and defend the faith (apologetics). They will, like Jesus, grow “in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people” (Lk 2:52). Their faith will begin to take deep root in their hearts and souls. Their ability to connect Scripture to their daily activities will multiply. Parents and their children will be learning the truth of the faith together and fulfilling Deuteronomy 6:7 by “Talk[ing] about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

Generally, families that worship together have seen their children grow up to love God and the church more. They see them take their faith seriously and personally. They tend to not walk away or deconstruct as they leave for college. If family worship is not something that is practiced in your home, start today!

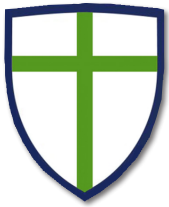


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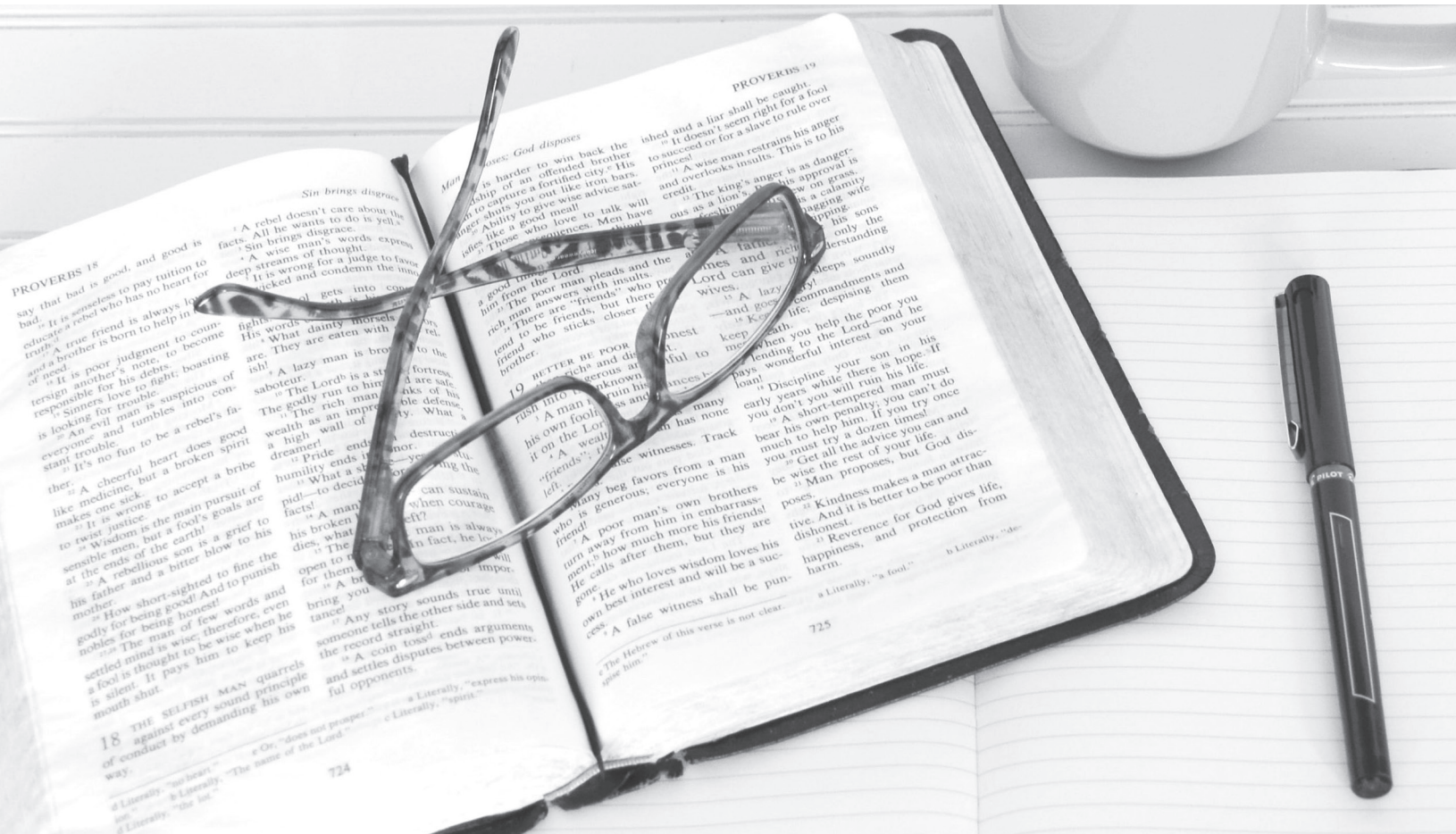
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God's Effectual Call

By Jonathan Hayashi



The Truth of the Gospel

I remember the first time I had an encounter with Jesus. I was born into a family with a mother who was a devout believer but a father who was a dogmatic atheist. I can remember my childhood, how my father had a major anger problem and physically abused my mother. I was in great fear of him. Things simply escalated and I eventually walked away.

At age 12, I began spending time with gang members and became addicted to the behavioral pattern of this sinful world. I was a very

angry, depressed youth. By age 15, I was a morally corrupt, sin-loving God-hater. Then, that September, I was caught by the police. I got kicked out of school, left the gang, left the girl I was with, and instead I began to seek the Lord.

At age 16, I met a pastor who shared the gospel with me, and for the very first time in my life, I decided to profess Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of the Father. My life has never been the same since meeting Jesus. Everything changed when he entered and upended my life. I was once heading straight to hell,

but Jesus rescued me from that eternal condemnation.

After I was saved, God opened the opportunity for me to go to a Christian school. I completed my undergraduate degree at Moody Bible Institute (B.A. in Pastoral Ministry, 2012) and completed a master's degree at Moody Theological Seminary (M.A. in Organizational Leadership, 2014). Just last year, I completed my doctorate from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (D.Ed.Min).

I served as an assistant pastor in Chicago for six years and afterward in St. Louis for another six years. Today, simply by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ as a monument of his grace, I serve as the senior pastor at Northern Hills Baptist Church in the Greater Kansas City area.

But as I look back after all my education, how did ALL THAT happen? How can we make sense of the doctrine of one's salvation experience? What does it mean to be called out? How does the Holy Spirit call? And what is calling in the context of salvation?

What is Calling in the Bible?

The words "calling" in Scripture are derived from several Hebrew and Greek words and are applied in various ways.

In the Old Testament, the verb *Sara* is used more than 700 times and is the most common verb in Hebrew that means "to call, summon, proclaim." The basic meaning is to draw attention to oneself by using one's voice.

In the New Testament, the verb *Kale* is used quite often and means "to call, invite, summon." This word appears hundreds of times in the New Testament, and it's applied in three primary ways:

1. To call to get his/her attention: Herod summons the Magi (Matt 2:7).

2. To name someone: The angel tells Zechariah his son's name is John (Luke 7:36, 39).

3. To call in a spiritual sense: "Out of Egypt, I called my son" (Matt 2:15).

While the idea of spiritual calling is not prevalent in the Gospels and Acts, it is highly developed in Paul's writing.

For instance, Acts 2:21 says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." This goes along with Paul's exposition in Romans 10:5-15.

How would you explain, to someone who doesn't know Jesus, the difference between God's general call and God's effectual call?

God's call to sinners for salvation is expressed in two ways in the New Testament: A general call to everyone through creation, conscience, the canon of Scripture, and the gospel of Christ. The second is an effectual call that connects believers with God's work outside of time.

General Calling & Effectual Calling?

The General Call: This is no way to excuse those who don't specifically hear the gospel from the responsibility for their sins. Men are, as Paul says, "without excuse" (Rom. 1:20).

God has revealed himself to all people in the creation and conscience. In creation we see that "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands" (Ps 19:1).

Matthew 13:3-9 and verses 18-23 say Jesus compares two kingdoms. The idea speaks of "fall." The word of the kingdom falls on rocky soil – the heart that embraces the gospel from a purely emotional or shallow sense of commitment. This is not the heart of a true believer, and the call is general in nature.

This is proven as well in the doctrine of election. Jesus summarizes in the Gospel account and says, “For many are invited, but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks of those who did not know him, “I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matt 7:23).

The Effectual Call: M. G. Easton writes, “An effectual call is something more than the outwards message of the Word of God to men. It is internal and is the result of the enlightening and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, effectively drawing men to Christ, and disposing and enabling them to receive the truth.”

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him on the last day” (John 6:44).

The classic text for Calvinists is Romans 8:28-30, which begins, “We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

Those God foreknew, elected, and predestined must be called, or drawn, to Jesus, resulting in eternal life.

Paul uses the term “called” to illustrate the fact that within the general call to all people is the effectual call that always results in everlasting life.

Therefore, if you are saved, it is because of the sovereign, gracious, and monergistic work of God (“monergistic” means God acts alone).

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

**“NO ONE CAN COME TO ME
UNLESS THE FATHER WHO
SENT ME DRAWS HIM, AND
I WILL RAISE HIM ON THE
LAST DAY.”**

JOHN 6:44

What is the tension that people may hold between the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility?

The Role of the Holy Spirit

The doctrine of pneumatology is the study of the Holy Spirit. A few have even said that the Holy Spirit is the forgotten third person of the Trinity at times.

Understanding the doctrine of pneumatology is crucial as it is perhaps one of the most misunderstood doctrines of all the systematics across all denominational lines.

Does general revelation provide, by itself, salvific truth? The general theistic question, “Could God exist?” comes too often without access to the Holy One (Knowledge of God) through natural means and the lens of one’s senses.

Can God reveal himself through baking zucchini bread or the faithful witness of the body of Christ? Could clay bring one to Jesus? These are a few examples of natural theology questions that one raises.

Could we possibly separate the incarnate Christ from the Triune God apart from Jesus himself? Is there an avenue to knowing Christ, or are there multiple means to know, apart from him?

1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “The person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God’s Spirit.” With this as our basis and argument, it is only by faith we understand there is regeneration. “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” (Rom 10:14-15).

Salvation is the mysterious working of the Triune God as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit call upon all people to repent:

- In Christ, I am free from any condemnation.
- In Christ, I have kept the righteous requirements of the law.
- In Christ, I am obligated to be led by the Spirit.
- In Christ, I am a child of God and a co-heir with Christ.
- In Christ, I will be redeemed from this cursed creation.
- In Christ, I am certain of my eternal glorification.
- In Christ, I fear nothing either in or out of this world.

When overcoming grace meets human freedom, let’s welcome both of these biblical truths and thank the Author of salvation that they are no mystery to him.

So, because lost people are totally depraved and incapable of responding positively to the gospel, unless God intervenes with an effectual call, how can God hold men responsible for their sins?

Gospel Preaching and Missional Outreach

The gospel makes this all possible. It’s “the power of God for salvation” (Rom 1:16). As Paul, in the same passage, said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel.”

It is amazing to know this truth that God has given the right to mankind to share the gospel of Christ to all men. Not angels, but man. Why? So that we may together experience this great joy we find in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

We have been talking about gospel conversation... evangelism! But, what does it mean? “Well, Jonathan, what it means is that you love people. If you want to summarize the life of Jesus in one word it is ‘kindness.’” Just so you know, that is not gospel conversation.

“Preach the gospel with all your life. If necessary, use words” (St. Francis of Assisi). Well, he got it wrong. You cannot give the gospel without conversing about it.

Ministry to open doors? Serving people’s needs? That is all good. We have a lot of organizations performing these services: The United Nations (human trafficking), the Federal government (HIV), agencies (water reclamation helps with poverty), and so on. There are a bunch of people who are working in those areas, and they are all wonderful! Those happen over and over again. There is one thing we do that no one can do. Somebody has to be dedicated to it.

Jesus said, “The poor you always have with you” (Matt 26:11). If you are drawn into taking care of the poor, making it your sole priority, you will never get back around to sharing the gospel. This is the one thing we must do. We are the only institution that is responsible for it.

While we can't do everything, we can do something. We can all take responsibility for one. And, because of God's power and the work of His Spirit, each of our ones can add up to make a significant impact on God's kingdom.

Charles Spurgeon was the pastor of Metropolitan Tabernacle in the 1800s. He was also known as the prince of preachers. He said it well once, "If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies." When it comes to evangelism and apologetics, they are a double-edged sword, and one cannot exist without the other. As someone once told me, the goal of an argument is to defeat the opponent. The goal of evangelism is to win the opponent.

Remember, lost people need Jesus. They are dead in their sin and only the Holy Spirit can convict and awaken their conscience. Too often, Christians have refused to treat atheists as their neighbors and have been content to remain ignorant of what people really believe and why they believe it. It is more important than ever for Christian believers to treat unbelievers in the same way we would treat believers of any other faith.

If you meet an atheist and find yourself filled with fear, stop and pray. We have no reason to fear – for the power that is in us is greater than that which is in the world (1 John 4:4).



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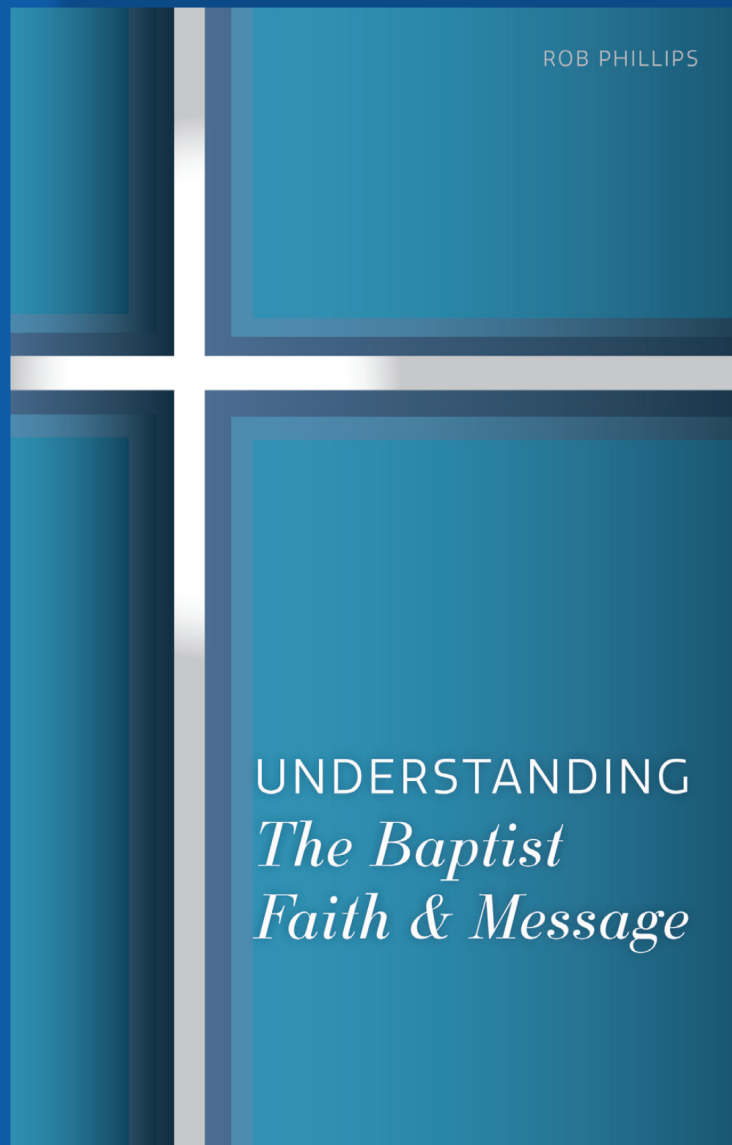
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