

TITLE PAGE

Apologetics

Rev. Julian Michael Zugg LLB (Hons) Barrister, M.Div

Belize Presbyterian Theological Seminary

P.O. Box 145, 12 St Matthew's Street, Belize City, Belize

CONTACT DETAILS:

Jzugg@mac.com
MissionBelize.org
Tel Belize 501 628 5404
Tel US 281 506 2833

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PREFACE

Christians are called to defend their faith. This work seeks to aid believers in that important task. The work is dedicated to the students at Belize Presbyterian Theological Seminary. I am grateful to God for His work in them, and for the zeal and commitment they show for His cause. I would like to thank Dr. Michael Payne, formerly of Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi, for inspiring and educating me in the study of Apologetics. This work draws very heavily on the work of Michael Payne, Van Til, Bahnsen and John Frame.

INTRODUCTION

This course is written to prepare students to give a bold and biblical defense of the Christian hope. It is an aid to the work of evangelism and mission. It is my prayer that it will better equip them to bring every thought captive to Christ, to pull down the strongholds of Satan and to present the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

COURSE CONTENT

The course is divided into eight chapters and has three major parts. Part 1 (chapters 1-5) outlines the biblical apologetic method. Part 2 (chapters 6 & 7) deals with common problems and objections when engaging in apologetics. Part 3 (chapter 8) looks at the importance of history in theology and apologetics.

COURSE MATERIALS

The course reading is the lecture notes and attached readings. This reading is drawn from web resources (the web address is available for each one). I have included them as an appendix after the lectures.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The course is designed to encourage students to study together, to interact both with themselves and the professor, to discuss and debate, and to gain a deeper understanding of the material. Furthermore, it is designed to give students a principled, scriptural and detailed understanding of the material and to encourage them to read original material in the field of apologetics. It is my hope that the students will also encourage others in these pursuits.

STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

This course has been written in 8 consecutive modules. The modules should be studied in order. The modules are not equal in length and so care must be taken to allocate sufficient time for each. The principle content is found in the lectures and should be supplemented with the required reading. The order of the readings will follow each part of the course.

Due to the difficulty of some of the material, it is anticipated that the majority of the time will be spent on the lectures, supplemented by the additional readings. The final project should only be attempted after lesson 4 has been completed.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Student will attend 16 hours of class time.

Students will do 16 hours of extra reading. The material is to be found in Appendix 1 and 2. Students will undertake a special project, as outlined in Appendix 3. There are two exams: the first is to be administered after lecture 5 and the second is to follow lecture 8. The exams count for 25% of the final grade.

COURSE EVALUATION

1. Student participation (15%): One point may be given for each class hour attended.
2. Student homework (15%): Two points may be given for each completed

homework assignment for the 8 lessons. If all homework assignments are completed, an extra point is awarded at the end of the course.

3. Student readings (20%): The readings are found in the Appendix sections. Bachelor level students will read 300 pages from Appendix 3. Master level students are required to do the additional reading in Appendix 3.

4. Student Special Project (25%): The special project is outlined in Appendix 4.

5. Student Exam (25%): The student will demonstrate his/her understanding of the main concepts and content of the course materials.

BENEFITS OF THIS COURSE

The course teaches students the basic principles of defending the faith, how to graciously expose and exploit the unbeliever's deceptions and to give a full defense of the Gospel.

Forward

This course is an introduction to apologetics. The course is useful to assist believers in giving a reason for the hope that is in them. Although it looks at all the major apologetic methods, the bulk of this course focuses upon presuppositional apologetics. The course attempts to lay a theoretical foundation, one which can be used to speak to non believers from any background. The course will engage Eastern religions and Muslim evangelism, as well as, discuss how to speak to the atheistic West. For a student who is interested in focusing his study upon dialoguing with someone from a particular, cultural background, a list of additional readings is included at the end of lesson three, footnote 11.

Julian Zugg
Belize Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Belize, Central America
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Lesson One. Introductory Principles

1. Introduction

In this lesson we will demonstrate the importance of apologetics for the church, introduce the main types of apologetics and briefly critique each one, then complete the lesson.

1.1. Text

There are two primary texts:

1 Peter 3:15 *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;”*

Ephesians 4:15 *“but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ,”*

1.2. A Defense

A defense (apologia) is something that is offered in a legal case in response to a formal allegation. Apologetics is a legal, formal and objective defense of Christianity as distinct from our personal witness or testimony (although it may include our testimony). It is a clear, objective and rational defense—a reasoned explanation for our beliefs.

1.3. By Who

All believers should be involved in apologetics. Peter’s command above is not limited to a special class of believers. Peter is speaking to the whole church.

Apologetics should also be the special task of the elders and rulers in the church—those with a particular responsibility to lead. In the letter to Titus, Paul was seeking to build up the struggling church in Crete. His method was to encourage Titus to appoint elders in each city. The elders were to *“hold fast the faithful word as he had been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict”* (Titus 1:9). Titus was to appoint elders and they were to defend the faith.

Paul gave a defense of the faith on a number of occasions.

Acts 17:17 *“Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, ‘What does this babbler want to say?’”*

Acts 26:2 *“I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer (apologia) for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews.”*

Philippians 1:7 *“just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense (apologia) and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.”*

Apologetics is the duty of all Christians, and especially of church leaders.

2. The Benefits of Apologetics

There are many benefits to studying apologetics. First, it helps us to better understand the nature of our own faith. It will strengthen us and makes us useful in the church.

Second, with patience, skill and practice, we can learn how to show the unbeliever the true nature of his unbelief and false reasoning, expose his unbelief; and therefore, bring him to understand his need. Paul states, *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”* (2 Cor. 10:3-6) .

Third, apologetics leads to us humbling ourselves before God as we wrestle with the effect of sin upon the natural man and the need for God’s revelation and special grace in bringing the Gospel.

Finally, apologetics will help us to develop a coherent worldview—one that will bless us and allow us to offer hope to others.

3. Apologetics, Theology, Mission and Evangelism

Apologetics is not a distinct theological unit. Because apologetics builds upon and is related to other areas of theology, it is influenced by and will influence other areas of our theology. Apologetics’ relationship to theology, mission and evangelism is particularly close. The interrelationship is evident in Paul’s address to the Aeropagus in Athens. In Acts 17:16-33, Paul is teaching theology, evangelizing and giving a defense of the faith at the same time. This defense is consistent with his theology and is given in a mission context. It is important to see the link between our theology and our methods. Both our apologetic message and method flow from our theology and must be consistent with it. Apologetics is part of and must be consistent with every aspect of our theology. As we shall see, there is often a real inconstancy between theology and apologetic method.

4. The Principle Apologetic Methods: Evidentialist, Classical, Presuppositional, Integrationist and Contextualism

In this section we will introduce the principle apologetic methods and offer a brief critique of each.

4.1. Evidentialist Apologetics

Carm (www.carm.org, Evidentialist) defines this apologetic method as: “that style of Christian defense that stresses the miracles found in the Bible, particularly Christ's resurrection, as an evidence for the existence of God and the validity of Christ and His words....It also uses historical evidences to support the veracity of the biblical.”

Critique: The Scripture does use evidence in presenting and defending the gospel. The Gospel is the historical and factual revelation of God—one that occurs in time and space—so it can be appealed to, but we must be cautious. First, the Scripture never claims that that evidence alone is powerful enough to save. It recognizes that no matter how compelling the evidence is, men will not respond to the truth. John records how Jesus raised Lazarus. This miracle proved His divinity and John records: *“Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, ‘What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation’ ”* (John 11:45-48). The very same evidence leads some to conversion and some to a further rejection of the truth. Evidence alone is insufficient to convert someone.

A more serious objection to this method is when external sources (historical evidence per Carm) are used to prove the Scriptures. This implies that there is another equal or greater source than the Scriptures. This is clearly not true and it is open to a number of objections. In some case it is impossible to appeal to external sources as the Scripture speaks of things like Creation and heaven. In addition, our general historical knowledge is often incomplete and is only corrected later. For example, there were cases in which Luke, states a fact that initially cannot be reconciled with secular history; however, later new evidence comes to light that supports him. These two examples show that evidence cannot prove the Scriptures and it is poor method to try to do so.

Also, using evidence to prove the truth, we quickly come to the point where we need to establish what is and what is not acceptable evidence and to the issue of how we interpret evidence. Those who do not believe in God will limit the evidence they accept or interpret it in ways that deny the very proofs the Scriptures make. For example, the rationalist might reject any claim to miracles because he does not think they are possible. The rationalist's presuppositions (see 2.3.3.) are controlling the evidence he can and cannot accept. The very evidence of Creation that points to God is reinterpreted to argue the case for evolution. The problem is not with the evidence, it is with the man interpreting or rejecting it.

Finally, in many cases evidentialists while claiming they use evidence “like the scripture uses it”, do not use either the same type of evidence to which the Scriptures appeal or they do not use it in the same way. For example, the most powerful evidence for God is the Creation itself. We do not need argue from evidence that God made the creation, rather the scriptures say that the very creation is proof, enough proof to show the existence of God. Every aspect of creation is a clear witness to the existence and nature of God. *The heavens declare the glory of God and the earth shows forth His handiwork* (Ps. 19). When evidentialists resort to proving the Creation by evidence (scientific proof) or proving the Scriptures by

referring to external evidence, they have denied the power of the biblical witness that the evidence of God and man is all around them.

4.2. Classical Apologetics

Carm (www.carm.org, Classical) defines the classical apologetics as “a defense that stresses rational arguments for the existence of God and uses evidence to substantiate biblical claims and miracles. It is quite similar to evidential apologetics and appeals to human reason and evidence. Early classical apologists include Augustine¹, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas. Contemporary classical apologists are Norman Geisler, William Craig, J. P. Moreland, and R.C. Sproul.”²

Two common *classical* arguments are the ontological argument (an argument from the nature of being) and the cosmological argument (an argument going back to first causes). Carm illustrates these arguments as follows:

“The universe cannot be eternal because if it were eternal then it would mean that an infinite amount of time has passed in order for us to get to the present. But you cannot transverse an infinite amount of time. Therefore the universe is not infinitely old.”

A cosmological argument is: “All things that came into existence are caused to exist. There cannot be an infinite regression of causes because this would mean that there was an infinite amount of time in the past that had to be traversed in order for us to get to the present. Again, you are not able to cross an infinite amount of time. Therefore, it is logical to say that there must be a single uncaused cause. I propose that that uncaused cause is God.”

Carm provides a third, more practical example dealing with prophecy:

- 1 The Bible claims to be the word of God.
 - 2 The Bible has been accurately transmitted to us through the copying method.
 - 3 The Old Testament was written before the New Testament.
 - 4 The Old Testament contains prophecies of Jesus fulfilled in the New Testament.
 - 5 Jesus fulfilled the prophecies.
 - 6 This shows that the Bible is inspired.
 - 7 Since it is inspired, it is accurate.
 - 8 It says that God exists.
- Therefore, God exists.

Critique: The critique of classical apologetics is similar to that against the evidentialist. We accept the Bible is logical and the Scriptures use logic in appealing to man. Isaiah himself says “*let us reason together*” (Isaiah 1:18). At the same time, the Scriptures talk of Man walking in darkness having their understanding darkened

¹ Carm classifies Augustine as a classical Apologetis, but many of Augustine’s teaching can be classified as presuppositionalist. In addressing these issues, we must remember that the debate was not being argued in the same way then, and so we cannot rigidly say someone was in this or that camp. In lesson 2, I will use Augustine as an illustration of a presuppositionalist.

² Because RC Sproul is such an important contemporary figure, we will include a more detailed look at his approach at the end of Chapter 2.

and therefore unable to come to knowledge of the truth. The Scriptures have a low view of fallen man's ability to reason to the truth.

We must also note that there is not a single case in which the Scriptures use either the ontological or cosmological arguments above in speaking to unbelievers. To do so would imply that the evidence of God's existence is not all around us and we need something else to prove God. Further, any logical argument must be grounded upon facts, and so, as in evidential apologetics, the debate will move to which facts are accepted and how do we interpret those facts. In the argument above concerning prophecy, we see that the Jews interpret 4 and 5 above in a very different way than Christians. It is not the logic they deny; it is the way the Scriptures are to be interpreted—the evidence—that they differ with and this evidence is based upon their presuppositions of who the Messiah is. Finally, the ontological and cosmological arguments can at best help to prove there is a God, but they do not prove the God of the Scriptures, and they cannot be used to prove the Trinity.

4.3. Presuppositional Apologetics

A Christian presuppositionalist "presupposes God's existence and argues from that perspective to show the validity of Christian theism. This position also presupposes the truth of the Christian Scriptures and relies on the validity and power of the Gospel to change lives (Rom. 1:16). From the Scriptures, we see that the unbeliever is sinful in his mind (Rom. 1:18-32) and unable to understand spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14). This means that no matter how convincing the evidence or good the logic, an unbeliever cannot come to the faith because his fallen nature will distort how he perceives the truth. The only thing that can ultimately change him is regeneration. To this end, the presuppositionalist seeks to change a person's presuppositions to be in conformity with biblical revelation" (www.carm.org, Presupposition).

Presuppositional apologetics, (the one this author favors) is probably the most powerful and coherent apologetic system. Many interpret this to mean we only talk about presumptions and so reject the place of evidence and logic. This is incorrect. Carm's definition above correctly states the position. The presuppositionalist begins by presupposing the truth of Scripture and then he uses the evidence of the Creation in a logical manner to display the truth in a constant and powerful manner. Like an evidentialist, he uses Scripture but his method—his use of evidence—is controlled by the Scripture. Like the classical apologetics he uses logic, but he never tries to prove God because Creation itself does that. In each case Scripture helps him to understand the evidence; he does not rely upon the evidence to prove Scripture. Presuppositionalism correctly stresses the limitation of evidence and logic, focusing on man's real problem: his sinful heart that has darkened his mind and will not submit to the revelations that surround him. Presuppositionalism also offers the most consistent theory of epistemology.

4.4. Integrationist Apologetics

A view popular in Miami International Seminary (Hegeman and Ramsey) is that the Scriptures use all three of these methods. They attempt to combine each method

calling this the “integrationist approach”.³ The value of this approach is that the Scriptures do use all of these methods; however, we must stress that the approach is only useful if the evidence and logical argument are done in the same way that the Scriptures do them. (The method is subject to the same critique of classic and evidential positions above.) Further, if we are trying to use all of these methods, the reasoning and assumptions behind evidence and classical apologetics (the underlying presuppositions) need to be put into a coherent structure. When does an evidentialist get his true source of authority? Can logic be independently valid of the Scripture as many classical apologists seem to imply? While it is fine to use these methods, integrationists must put their ideas into a coherent theory or confusion and contradictions will occur. These critiques can all be met by a proper understanding of presuppositionalism which uses evidence and logic in a way consistent with the theology of the Scriptures provides a stronger framework.

4.5. Contextualism

Neal Hegeman identifies⁴ a third type of apologetics, *contextualism*.⁵ He states “Contextualization presents an alternative to both evidentialism and presuppositionalism. A contextualist’s argument may differ from context to context. What may be true for a middle class American consumer is not necessarily true for a Central American peasant who lives in a feudal society or philosophy.” He then goes on to use the example of liberation theology (amongst others) stating, “Liberation theology seeks to interpret the Bible and the gospel from the view of the oppressed. It is said that God has a preferential option for the poor. Whether the student agrees with the ideological presuppositions of contextualization, its prominence is undeniable and its concerns need to be reckoned with. In Roman Catholic circles, the writings of Gustavo Gutierrez, and Enrique Dussel are well known for their theology of liberation.” He argues that it is impossible to put contextual theology in one category that is consistent. The relative nature of contextualism means that the only consistency is a consistency in their relativism.

Hegeman is correct in identifying these as important issues facing an apologist, the context is vital to any analysis; however, there is no need to state that it presents another way of doing apologetics. In reality contextualism is merely another form of presuppositionalism. In contextualism a person approaches the Scriptures with a particular concern or agenda. These concerns are driven by his underlying values, his presuppositions, as to how things should be. The Central American Peasant will see thing one way, the middle class American consumer will see things another way. Each will then interprets the Scriptures according to the underlying presuppositions. Hegeman implicitly assents to this argument when he states, “Anthropology, history, political science and sociology become the sources for argumentations and ideological sources rather than the Bible.” The consequences are that these presuppositions will color and distort the Scriptures into the image of that overriding philosophy. The individual is interpreting Scripture through his lens, presupposition and bias, rather than allowing the Scriptures to control his thinking. This is really a

³See Hegeman ,Mints-
http://mints.edu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=69&Itemid=77

⁴ While not agreeing

form of presuppositionalism and can be interpreted within that framework. For an extended look at liberation theology, students should read Appendix 2.

5. Jesus' Apologetic Method – John 5

Having identified the various apologetic methods used, we now turn to a scriptural example of apologetics—that of Christ as He defends His witness against the Pharisees. Sproul (*Defending your Faith* 8) argues that the two key issues in apologetics are the proof of God and the doctrine of the Scriptures. The passage in John deals with Jesus' self-revelation, (it is a proof of God) and since Jesus is the word of God, it also deals with the issue of proving the Scriptures.

“Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God....‘Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me. If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true. You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life’” (John 5:18, 24-40).

These verses develop Christ's own apologetic.

First, Jesus does not talk of truth in the abstract; rather Jesus relates truth to the person of the Father and to His own person. Jesus speaks about believing, trusting and the witness of the truth. When Jesus does this, He is talking about trusting in Himself and His Father. Jesus places His Father and Himself, His words and His works at the very center of every claim. The truth and the person of God cannot be separated. Jesus links truth to His witness to His Father. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life as He walks according to His Father. Jesus bears witness of His Father, another personal expression of the truth. Jesus and His life are truth because they reflect the Father's life. Since God is truth, Jesus says that we will only understand the truth as we enter into a relationship with Him, a relationship that involves humble submission (John 5:39, 40). This is the true ground of knowledge. To use Old

Testament language, the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom: “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction*” (Prov. 1:7). As the relationship develops, we will see more of the truth. As we grow in our relationship, we will also grow in knowledge.

Second, Jesus asserts that His witness does not depend upon the testimony of men. In John 5:34 He states, “*yet I do not receive testimony from man*”. If something could bear witness to the truth of Jesus without Him, a person would have an independent authority outside of God and that something would be equal or greater than Him. Jesus’ rejection of man’s testimony means that there is no way that we can prove God from another external matter. There is not a single place in the Scriptures where God tries to prove Himself to man. In Genesis 1, God does not seek to prove the Creation; rather the Creation is an expression of His own glory. The Creation and His work reflect who He is, but they do not prove Him. Likewise in John 5, Jesus does not try to prove or validate Himself. Even the signs do not prove Him, rather they prove that He is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Anything that tries to prove God must be of equal or greater authority than God Himself.

Jesus stresses the limited role of evidence. He states, “*Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved*” (John 5:34). While Jesus will not allow any human evidence to prove Himself, He says that these things were given for us, to help us to understand. Man cannot seek to prove God on the evidence, but the evidence does help man to believe. Man works from the premise that the Scriptures are true and the evidence supports this. This shows that our apologetics must deal with the whole man, not just a rational argument or an appeal to signs. Jesus does not begin by placing a rational argument first, followed by a list of proofs. He begins by claiming the truth, then He says, if you need extra help, look at the signs. This is also the model we are to use. (See the Carm definition of presuppositionism in 4.3. above.) We are to proclaim the truth and then show how the evidence in the Scriptures, Creation and man all validate that truth. The signs show the consistency between Jesus’ claim and the truth. This is the correct biblical use of evidence. This use of evidence does not prove God, but it can be helpful in assisting him to believe.

The use of signs in John’s gospel is subtle. Jesus did many signs: “*And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name*” (John 20:30, 31). John uses these signs to show that Jesus is the prophesied Son, the one who was promised and active in the Old Testament. The first part of the book of John, the book of signs, shows that the Old Testament is fulfilled in Him. In John 2 He is seen as the true temple of God. In John 3 He is seen as the fulfillment of the bronze serpent. In John 4 He is the one who is greater than Jacob, for Jacob’s well only gave physical water, whereas He gives the true and living water. In John 6 He is seen as the true manna from heaven of which the physical manna is only a token. In John 7 He is seen as the fulfillment of the feasts. The signs that John refers to in John 20:30 are the signs of fulfillment—that the Scriptures are true.

John’s use of signs is as follows:

1. You have heard the claims (the presuppositions)

2. I do these things

3. therefore I am the one who was expected, and I am God.

The signs always include a reference to the Old Testament (1 above), rather than just say "I am God."

Jesus also claims that there is the need for the Spirit in explaining and pressing home the truth (Himself) to sinners. The two principle texts are

"These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:25, 26).

"But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you" (John 16:5-15).

These texts illustrate an important principle: Due to sin/the fall, man needs God's aid to understand and see revelation. Ultimately it is the powerful work of God in the Holy Spirit that must convince the world of sin, righteousness and judgment.

The "story" of John's Gospel indicates that our apologetic method should also include a story. John tells us "the story of Jesus" to prove that He is the Son of God. He does not offer abstract proofs and logical arguments. Telling the story of the Gospel from the Scriptures in our lives as we look at the world is a valid biblical apologetic method. We can get the unbeliever to tell us the story of his life and then we can contrast it with the story of Christ and our own stories of God's grace to us. The contrast between the believer's and the unbeliever's stories is a powerful one. Finally, we are to call unbelievers to walk in the story of Jesus. If they will enter into God's story, calling upon Him for salvation, they will see its truth. We see this in John 5 and John 9. In John 9 Jesus spoke to a lame man. The man knew little but he obeyed. As he continued to walk in the truth, (defending Jesus against the Pharisees), Jesus came to him again revealing more of Himself to the man. The same thing occurred in John 5 with the man healed at the pool of Siloam.

Many men stand back, outside the story, and try to judge its truth from this position. This is not possible. The Pharisees tried to stand outside the story of Jesus and make judgments upon it. In contrast, as the lame man walked in the story of Jesus, he grew in knowledge and understanding. In John 5 the lame man is called by Jesus to enter into His story. He is called to listen and obey. He does so. He takes up his bed and walks. At this stage he has entered into the claims of Christ even though he

has little knowledge. We do not learn by standing outside the story in judgment upon it; we learn by entering into the story of the life of Christ. As we enter, we grow in our understanding of the truth. We need to invite others to listen to our story, to enter into the story of the church and to enter into the story of Jesus. We need to invite them to come, to submit and to walk in it, rather than standing outside of it in judgment. As you submit and walk in the truth, so it will be shown to you. As Jesus says, *“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him”* (John 14:21).

Conclusion

God calls each one of us to defend the faith. Our apologetics is to be consistent with our theology. In history, there have been three main types of apologetics and two less argued ones. We have an example of Jesus' own apologetic method in John 5.

Summary

Over time the church has developed a number of ways to defend the truth. Evidentialism appeals to evidence to support the claims of the Scriptures. Classical apologetics appeal to reason and logic. Presuppositionalism focuses upon the underlying problem of sin. It presupposes the Scriptures are true and argues for consistency between the Scriptures and the Creation. Integrationists try to use all of the methods above, claiming scriptural support for each one. Contextualists are controlled by the history and underlying concept; they read this back into the Scriptures.

Lesson One Questions

1. What text shows the importance of apologetics?
2. Name one benefit of apologetics.
3. Is apologetics related to other areas of theology? Why is this important?
4. What is evidentialism?
5. Describe the classical apologetic method
6. What is presuppositionalism?
7. What do integrationists believe?
8. What is contextualism?
9. Did Jesus prove His divinity from signs?
10. Explain the concept of apologetics as a story.

Lesson Two. The Case for Presuppositional Apologetics

1. Introduction

In this lesson we will continue to discuss the main types of apologetics. Bahnsen in Van Til's Apologetic argues that instead of the three types of apologetics which we have identified above, there are really only two methods of doing apologetics—the classical/evidential/traditional apologetics and presuppositional apologetics.⁶ This lesson explores his thinking. The second half of this lesson develops some of the key presuppositional concepts, namely the true point of contact and the relationship between facts, interpretations and presuppositions.

2. A Simple Maxim to Explain Presuppositionalism

The debate can be tricky, so I have introduced a simple maxim that will help us understand the argument – *Faith is not unreasonable but you cannot reason to faith.* The quote has two sides. First, since God made the world, and since God's revelation is true, all logic and evidence point to the truth of God. Presuppositionalists agree that the universe is made to reflect God and does so. All reason, logic and evidence do point towards God. At the same time, presuppositionalists also affirm that the use of these arguments, logic, evidence, and the like, will never be sufficient to prove God; and therefore, should not be the main focus of their attack. This is due to the following biblical truths: 1. For us to know God, God must reveal Himself to us. 2. We are corrupted by sin, hostile to God, and as a result, cannot be persuaded to become a Christian by reason and logic. It is impossible. To speak of how we are to prove God and how we can use logic to argue for God's existence deny that God has already revealed Himself to us in creation. Furthermore, arguing for God's existence denies the real issue—that we are sinners who know of Him and willfully reject Him.

Man cannot prove God. As reasons 1 and 2 above state, there is no meeting place, no neutral ground, from which to begin the debate. Since this is so, another approach must be found. In the next section we will look at the so-called middle ground, the neutral area, which many Christians try to argue from.

3. Apologetics and the “Middle Ground”

A key feature in both classical and evidentialist apologetics is that both methods try to argue their case by finding a middle ground, a so-called neutral place that both

⁶ Presuppositional apologetics gets its name from Cornelius Van Til. While he was not the first to use this method, he was the first to define and develop it in an epistemologically, self-conscious manner. Through his thorough writings, he challenged both unbelievers, as to the truth, and believers in asking them if their theology and the apologetics were consistent. Van Til developed self-consciously consistent principles of Reformed apologetics. Greg Bahnsen (1948-95) was a noted Apologist who followed Van Til's thinking.

parties can agree upon. This middle ground is the basis upon which we appeal to the unbeliever and press home our attacks. This can be an appeal to logic—we both agree that the world is logical—and from this logic we can work out certain things; or it can be an appeal to evidence—we both agree that these facts are true—and from this basis, we can argue that everything else about Christianity is true. An example of the former is “because there is a logical system in the world, and from this we can logically prove that there is absolute truth, so we can prove God.” An example of the latter is that “because there were witnesses to the resurrection of Christ from the dead, Christ must have risen from the dead, so He must be God.”

Classical apologetics argues that there is common ground or a middle ground between the believer and the unbeliever that allows us to bridge the gap between them. It is argued that if we can find a bridge, we can communicate the Gospel more effectually.

Van Til argued that a key aspect of both systems, classical and evidentialist apologetics (we will just use the term “classical apologetics” to describe this group from now on) was the need to find that common ground, a neutral position, in order to present the Gospel. He saw that the common ground had to be based upon reason, logic and evidence and from that meeting place, classical apologetics builds the bridge, a foundation from which we can argue for the existence of God and the truth of the Scriptures. Once a point of contact is found, the classical apologetic will then advance proofs for the existence of God.⁷

Van Till acknowledged that the Bible used logic and evidence to present its case, but he rejected the idea that there is any neutral point of contact, any real point of agreement between the believer and the unbeliever that can be developed from evidence or logic. There is no real place that both the believer and the unbeliever can agree upon. As we argued above, there are two reasons why there will never be a meeting point. Man needs God to reveal Himself to him and man is fallen in sin and rebellion against his Creator and so seeks to be autonomous, free from God with all his being. Man’s fallen rebellious nature and his desire to be “without God” controls his thinking and so it does not matter what evidence or logic is put before him, he will reject the truth. He knows he is a sinner under God’s just condemnation, but he will not submit. The issue is not logic, evidence or reason, it is submission. Man cannot understand God without revelation and because he is fallen, he will not submit to the revelation that God gives him.

Van Til then went further. He argues that in the light of the Scriptural evidence, to try to seek common ground is not just a mistake, it is actually an attack upon the clear revelation and teaching of the Scriptures. Since man knowingly rejects the clear witness of Creation (Rom. 1:18-22: Lesson 4), attempting to find another so called “neutral basis” denies the Scriptures claim that man is a creature fully dependent upon God’s revelation to him and that he is in willful rebellion. Man has never been, nor will he ever be, able to independently weigh evidence for or against God’s existence. He was never made to and does not even have the right to. Believers are

⁷ Contra Sproul who argues that classical apologetics such as Aquinas did believe in the need for grace to penetrate through. On page 81 he states: “It seems that a man cannot know any truth without grace.”

using unscriptural methods when they use this approach; their methods are inconsistent with and deny the very truth they need to teach.

When we allow man to use logic to prove God, we have already allowed him to set his mind as an independent authority, one that seeks to operate outside of God's revelation. This is a denial of the Scriptures. When a man says, you must prove that God exists, if we then try to prove that God exists, we are accepting that he has a right to say, you must prove that God exists. The Bible says he has no such right, and that man can not understand anything unless he submits to revelation. If we try to prove God without the Scriptures, we ourselves are in violation of the Scriptures.

Furthermore, since fallen man is hostile to God, he does not have the right to weigh up God's existence; he never will. He cannot, because of the power of sin in his life. Since man is at war with God and hates God, he is not subject to the law of God, neither can he be (Romans 8:7). The relationship is summarized in Genesis 3:15 which states: "*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.*" Fallen man's problem is not lack of evidence or unclear logic; his problem is that he has rejected God and the evidence that is all around him. Since this is true, there is no true neutral place, a place that the Christian and the non-Christian can agree upon.

4. The Divide—Two Systems of Apologetics

While classical and evidentialists focus on the arguments that can be brought to prove God from a neutral ground, presuppositionalists focus upon the corruption of man due to sin and his refusal to subject himself to God's clear revelation in Creation. They argue that there is no common ground.

When analyzed in this manner, they are different methods built upon two fundamentally different ways of looking at the fundamental issue of apologetics—Creation and fallen man. In the classical system we have autonomous man relying upon his own understanding in order that he might find the truth. In the presuppositional system, we see that man has always needed God's help to understand truth and that he is fallen, depraved and hostile to God. When put this way, we see that just as there is no common ground between the believer and the unbeliever, there is also no common ground between the two apologetic approaches. Since the two systems are fundamentally different.

Presuppositionalists recognize this and believe that any attempt to find a middle ground is dangerous. An important aspect of presuppositionalism is that it rejects the idea that the natural man can or should claim any independent autonomy in understanding God or the world. When man tries to do that, he flatly denies the reality of his place as a creature in the world. Man does not have the right, nor is he even able to weigh up the evidence in order to see if God exists in the world. Any argument that begins by appealing to anything outside of God or any argument that appeals to man's reasoning independent from the Scriptures is flawed and should not be pursued.⁸

⁸ Given presuppositionalists understanding of fallen man, how do presuppositionalists argue that the Gospel is to be presented? First, they should

5. A Historical Analysis of the Two Types of Apologetics ⁹

The two methods are illustrated through two historical figures, Thomas Aquinas and Augustine. As Aquinas and Augustine operated from a different theological basis, they both developed different apologetic methods, illustrating the point that our theology will control our apologetics.

Thomas Aquinas

“Credo ut Intelligam”, “I understand in order to believe”.

As a Roman Catholic, Thomas Aquinas believed that man’s mind was not totally corrupted by the fall. Since man’s mind was not fallen, his mind was still capable of understanding the truth directly without God’s aid. This led Aquinas to believe that by the will and reason a man could come to faith. Fallen man can reason correctly—fallen man can have accurate knowledge and a true interpretation of the world around him—so that he can reason his way to God. He also believed that man is able to act autonomously, without God’s help, in order to understand truth: he is not dependent upon God’s revelation in the Scriptures in order to understand.¹⁰

“[T]his approach assumes that fallen man is capable of reasoning in a proper way (prior to repenting of sin and submitting to a savior) and that knowledge and intelligent interpretation of experience are philosophically possible, apart from God’s revelation” (*Van Til’s Apologetic* 47).

Augustine

In contrast, Augustine stated that:

“I must first believe, then I can understand.”

Augustine had a deeper view of sin and human depravity. He held that fallen man cannot properly understand God, and therefore is in no position to stand in autonomous judgment of God. “Reason has no self-sufficient ability to interpret experience, and no true authority to judge the Christian faith” (*Van Til’s Apologetic* 47).

stress that the Gospel must stress God’s sovereignty. Man must not be allowed to think that he is acting independently or autonomously in any way. The apology must not allow man to feel that he is in a position to judge God. He must understand that he needs God in order to understand. Logic and evidence can and should be used, but only in a way that promotes these basic axioms. The use of logic and evidence must be consistent with the way that the Bible uses evidence. We will look at this in more detail later.

⁹Note the link between the Catholic Pelagius and the Arminian view of man. Both overestimate the ability of man to know and both underestimate the effect of the Fall. These both have developed the same apologetic method. In contrast, Reformed teaching, with an emphasis on man’s need for revelation and the doctrine of total depravity, both lead to a different understanding of the issues behind apologetics.

¹⁰ Contra Sproul, *Defending your Faith* 79)

Accordingly, man cannot understand or correctly interpret anything without listening to God. To understand he must bring himself under God's authority; he is in need of God's special revelation to him (*Van Till Apologetics* 47).

The Bible makes these points in Romans 1:21; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 4:17, 18; Romans 12:2.

"because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, their foolish hearts were darkened" (Rom. 1:21).

"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Reason has no independent place outside the Scriptures. God is Lord over even our minds. We need this revelation in order to understand. We are to understand that our minds are darkened, and they need renewing.

"This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:17, 18).

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

Aquinas and Augustine, with their differing views of sin and depravity, illustrate the two main lines of apologetic thought. They also illustrate how our theology is linked to our apologetic method.

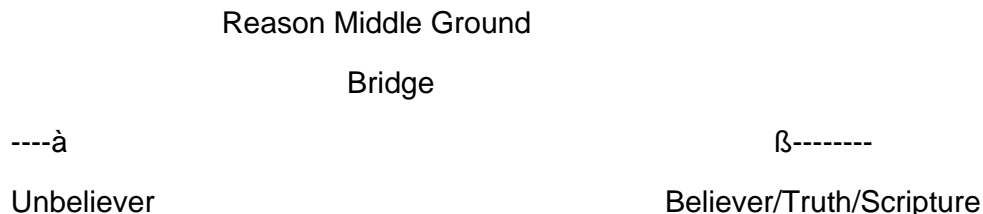
6. Explaining the Two Models through Diagrams

This next section seeks to clarify and further critique the two systems.

5.1. Illustration/Critique of the Classical Model

In order to distinguish between traditional and presuppositional apologetics, I have illustrated the problem with the following diagrams.

Traditional/Classical



In the traditional method, the unbeliever and the believer can bridge the gap of faith. By looking for common or neutral ground, agreeable to both and supposedly without bias, they can debate the truths of Christianity. The Christian then, by reason, logic and evidence tries to argue for the kingdom.

In this argument, logical proofs prove Christianity and common experience dominate. This places the human mind and human rationale at the very center of the debate.

Classical apologetics is built upon the presumption that the human mind can reason its way to the truth.

There are numerous problems with this approach. How do the Christian and non-Christian agree upon what facts are allowable and what facts are not? This can be simply illustrated by asking the question, Are the Scriptures an allowable fact? The Christian would answer, “Yes” He holds they are and they are essential; the non-Christian would say, “No”.

What about personally perceived facts and common experience? Can the Christian and non-Christian agree upon how these are to be interpreted? All facts need interpreting; there is no such thing as a brute fact—one that exists on its own—without a framework or context. All facts are really interpreted facts and the act of interpreting will add bias to the debate. How are we to interpret our experience? The Christian works from a biblical context; the non-Christian works from an unbelieving context. The Christian says we interpret our experience by the Word; the non-believer says we do this without the Word, by our own unaided reason. From what we have seen, can we truly say we have a common ground in our interpretations, particularly in light of the Fall?

5.2. Illustration/Critique of the Presuppositional Model

Reformed/Presuppositional

No bridge

No common ground

No real understanding

Unbeliever/Fallen Hostile

Believer

According to the presuppositionalism, there can be no unbiased neutral position. We will illustrate this by looking at the believer’s and the unbeliever’s positions in more detail.

5.2.1. The Believer’s Position-Under Christ

Jesus, as Creator and Redeemer, is the believer’s Lord. The believer has surrendered his life to Christ. He understands the Word as Christ presents it through the Scriptures; as a result, the Scriptures control the believer’s thoughts and outlook. Christ gives meaning and interprets the world around him. The believer cannot take any position that does not put Christ in the center. Since Christ speaks in the Scriptures, the believer must use the Scriptures as evidence—failure to do so would be to deny his Lord, and is inconsistent with his own methods. Jesus often quoted the Scriptures. As his Lord, the believer must start from the Scriptures, using all his ability and relying upon the Spirit to correctly understand them. Faith is essential to his ability to understand and to be able to interpret. The believer can interpret the facts correctly only when he follows Christ, uses the Scriptures, and is aided by the Spirit and faith. Without these, he cannot interpret the facts. The believer is for Christ and truth and can never be neutral.

5.2.2. The Unbeliever's Position—His Own Authority

The Calvinistic position¹¹ argues that the unbeliever cannot be neutral either. The unbeliever places himself at the center. He becomes his own source of authority. It is only his reason and logic that control the debate. In his world, he is the final authority—the only one who can decide what is valid or not. The great lie Satan sold to man was that he would be as God, an independent authority able to know truth (good and evil) without God's help. Adam believed that lie and man has been trying to live as an independent authority ever since.

The Scriptures do not say that man is independent or independently able to understand truth. The very idea is a lie, one that Satan told man in the Garden. Any apologetic method that accepts that position or encourages it is retelling the same lie. The truth is that any claim to be an authority is a manifestation of man's hatred and rejection of God.

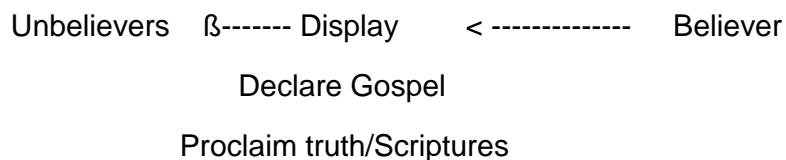
Diagram: The Believer's and Unbeliever's True Positions



In conclusion, the Calvinistic position is that there is no such thing as a neutral position. One is either for Christ and truth or against Him and His word and at odds with Creation. One either gathers or scatters (Matt. 12:30). This also means that there is no such thing as a neutral investigation. Either we set the boundaries for what is acceptable or God sets the boundaries for what is acceptable.

5.3. The Aim of the Calvinistic Apologist

Reformed apologetics demands a reformed apologetic method. Instead of trying to find common ground, Calvinistic apologetics shows the unbeliever the truth about his own position. It tries to expose the consequences of unbelief, showing how he has placed his own artificial boundaries upon himself and how that position cannot be logically and consistently held. Once this is done, it then declares to him the truth of Scripture, according to Christ. The aim of this process is to expose his intellectual lies and uncover his heart.



¹¹ The system of doctrine advocated by John Calvin, that stresses man's total depravity and the need for God to sovereignly save his people from their sins.

6. Presuppositionalism, Common Ground, and the Point of Contact

This section takes an in-depth look at the Reformed idea of a point of contact. We will examine the idea that there is no real point of contact—the only *real* point of contact is man’s sin.

6.1. No Point of Contact: A Difference in Principle

Is presuppositionalism correct in stating that there is no common ground? A quick look at how believers and non-believers operate seems to show that there is common ground. When two farmers in Belize farm cane together, are they not operating on the same set of presumptions and understanding of the world and how cane grows? Superficially, the believer and the unbeliever look like they are working with the same worldview, but presuppositionalism argues that if we look more deeply, we will see that both are operating on totally different principles.

Let us assume that a drought occurs. In such cases the believing cane farmer prays to God to help him, but the unbeliever ascribes the cause to chance or fate, the weather and bad luck. The drought will expose the totally different worldview that each has.

Van Til in addressing this issue spoke of an “opposition in principle”. In particular, in the ordinary day-to-day activities, both believers and unbelievers do the same activities; but when we look at the real principles behind their actions, we see that in fact they are operating on totally different principles (Apologetics 101-104, 417). In the simplest terms, an unbeliever is doing everything based on his own self-interest; whereas, a believer is acting according to the glory of God.

6.2. Exploiting the Point of Contact

Presuppositionalists argue that the classical idea that we are to look for a point of contact is still useful, but in another sense. As we discuss truth with the unbeliever on issues that we seem to agree upon, this will give us the opportunity to show that we do not really agree with them; but in fact, we have a totally differing worldview. The believer can use this point of contact to show not the similarities but the difference.

If two Belizean farmers are talking about farming and rain, this is a so called “point of contact”. The believer can then use this point of contact to show that his worldview is completely different from the worldview of the unbeliever. In this conversation, he can show the difference between the Mayan rain god and the one true living God, possibly using passages from Elijah and Matthew 5:43. This so called “point of contact” allows the believer to show to the unbeliever why he and the unbeliever think in very different ways.

As part of the process of speaking with the unbeliever, we are to expose his ultimate commitments—those loyalty commitments that control his thought process and frame

the way that he thinks. We are to show that the unbeliever cannot prove these; they are basic axioms that are articles of faith.

6.3. Redefining the Point of Contact: Man's Sin.

The above illustrates that presuppositionalism does seek a point of contact, but the Reformed point of contact does not stress agreement, rather it stresses the disagreement between the two worldviews. Part of this is to explain the true nature of his sin— that all men do know Him but they chose not to glorify Him. The true nature of sin is not ignorance; it is the suppression of the knowledge of God.

7. The Problem with Facts

In this section we will examine the presuppositionalist's position on the relationship between proof, facts and presuppositions. As we will see, the difficulty is that all facts are subject to interpretation, and we interpret facts according to our own biases and understanding.

7.1. Facts and Interpretation

Presuppositionalism stresses that all men work from presuppositions, or basic axioms, and these color or control how they see the truth and facts. A few weeks ago I was talking to a Belizean about the recent change of government. As Belizeans know, some people are very against the old government and some people are very for it. As we talked, we often referred to the same events; however, since we both either liked or disliked the old government, we interpreted its actions in different ways. Because I did not like it, I interpreted its actions in the worst way, but my friend liked it so he interpreted its actions in a good way. What we were doing became more and more clear to us as we continued to argue. The thing that was controlling us was not the facts; but how we were interpreting the facts according to our preconceived judgments. This is a non-religious illustration of how our presuppositions or biases control our factual interpretations.

7.2. No "Objective" Facts

In many arguments it is common to hear, let's just look at the facts. The idea is that if we just sit back and look at the facts objectively, then both sides will be able to see the truth. In such cases the reality that there is no such thing as neutral or brute fact must be stressed. Like an agreement in principle, there are no neutral facts, rather each fact is linked to other facts; and each fact is and can only be seen as part of a system of belief, a worldview. Facts are never in isolation; rather, every fact is still part of a worldview. Behind all arguments are basic/ultimate commitments or presuppositions that we will not change. We can illustrate this from the situation of the farmer. At one level, both the believing farmer and the unbelieving farmer agree that there has been rain. When asking deeper questions about where the rain came from and if we are to give thanks for the rain, the believer and unbeliever will answer the questions differently. The believer will interpret the rain as part of the Creation of God, under His control, and back into the framework of a sovereign God over all Creation. In contrast, the unbelieving farmer, because he doesn't believe in a sovereign, creator God, will go as far back as the clouds and then fall into some form

of materialist or atheistic reason. A Mayan religious farmer will still trace the fact back to something in his religion, a sacrifice made to him or something of like nature. While there can be agreement on some facts (e.g., it rained), because all facts are related, this leads us very quickly to interpreting those facts with our worldview. Below are two illustrations of how the same basic, brute fact can be interpreted in different ways.

The Sunrise: Because God makes the sun rise every day, and because we believe that God is good, we believe that good God will continue to allow the sun to rise. If God is seen as evil, then the fact of the sunrise will be interpreted in a different way. Because these men believe that God is evil, they believe that when He does send good days, it will not last or that He is setting them up for even more hardship later.

Exams: Personally, because I was not very good at exams, they were always something to be dreaded. In contrast, my sister was good at exams; therefore, when an exam came up, she worked from the basis that if she studied hard she would get an A. In each case, the same event was interpreted in different ways.

Each of these illustrations shows us that our interpretation of the neutral facts is colored by history and biases. All facts are interpreted in different ways.

7.3. The Question: What Facts are Allowable

In the section above, we saw that another problem in any argument is determining what are allowable facts. We might debate a point and during the course of that debate, appeal to a fact—something we might think is absolutely vital to our argument, like the Scriptures or the miracles of Jesus. In these situations the other side might say that this is not an allowable fact, and so he will not accept it. What controls the facts we allow and do not allow?

Just like in the case of how we interpret facts, the facts that we deem allowable are also controlled by our ultimate commitments. Our ultimate commitments control the facts we allow in an argument. This shows that our commitments channel what evidence we allow. In this situation the believer is also to show the unbeliever that his neutral evidence and facts are also controlled by his presuppositions.

8. The Correct Use of Facts and Logic in Presuppositional Thinking.

At this point you may be asking, what use are facts at all. Do presuppositionalists say that we only need to expose the presuppositions and that facts and logic can not be used in our argument? Presuppositionalists do not say this. We began this section by stressing that we cannot reason to faith, but faith is not unreasonable. The correct use of the facts in this system is to use them to expose the other party's presuppositions (see 7 above) and once you have put forward the scriptural view of the matter, only then do you use facts to support your presuppositions of the Scriptures. The key is to remember that while you cannot prove the truth through logic and evidence, logic and evidence do support the truth of the Scriptures. The distinction is a fine one. If we say I will prove Christianity to you by logic, reason and facts, we are being unscriptural in our method. However, if we say the Scriptures are God's word, they are truth, and all evidence and logic are consistent with that revelation, then we are using facts to support the presumptions. This is biblical and

can be very helpful to the unbeliever. We cannot prove the Scriptures by logic and evidence, but at the same time, the truth contained in God's revelation is supported by logic and evidence. We must also recognize that logic and evidence will never be conclusive in this debate. The revelation of God in the Scriptures must be received by faith.

Conclusion

Apologetics is the study of every believer. The believer is not to look for points of contact; rather, he is to display the truth of the Scriptures, even as Christ did. Once he has done that, he has done his duty. We have also seen that there is the closest relationship between facts, interpretations and biases.

Summary

It is every believer's duty to be involved in apologetics. Presuppositional apologetics is consistent with Reformed Theology; one that admits to the need for God's revelation and admits that fallen man is hostile to God. Due to this, there is no real point of contact between the unbeliever and the believer. This also seems to be Christ's own apologetic method. A believer's duty is to use all his skill to present the Gospel to the unbeliever, as fully as possible, and then wait for God to do the work. A believer must also be able to understand the true nature of the point of contact and be aware of the relationship between facts and interpretation.

Lesson Two Questions

1. What is the middle ground?
2. How does Bahnsen divide the disciples of apologetics?
3. Does presuppositionalism agree there is a middle ground?
4. How does our theology influence our apologetics?
5. Describe Aquinas's theology and his apologetic method.
6. Does classical apologetics believe man can be neutral?
7. Is there such a thing as a neutral fact?
8. What is the presuppositional point of contact?
8. What controls which facts we will accept in a debate?
10. What do we mean when we say we are to expose the unbeliever's ultimate commitments?

Lesson Three. Defining Truth, The Revelation of God and Arguing a Complete Worldview

1. Introduction

In this section we will look at the definition of truth. Scripture declares that truth is neither impersonal nor abstract as it is based upon a personal and Trinitarian God. Scripture also presents truth holistically, as a complete worldview, rejecting the idea that truth is limited to a few logical axioms which we might be able to prove. Finally, we will look at current Western theories that try to hold values while at the same time denying any absolute truth.

2. Truth

One of the central themes of Christianity and apologetics is the issue of what is truth. John illustrates the importance of truth in the story of Jesus before Pilate. John writes:

“Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘Are You a king then?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.’ Pilate said to Him, ‘What is truth?’ And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, ‘I find no fault in Him at all’” (John 18:37-41).

John concludes his Gospel by stating, *“This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true” (John 21:24).*

John’s Gospel is a proclamation of the truth, and Jesus and John link truth to the revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus bears witness to the truth and everyone who is of the truth hears Him. Frame develops a similar argument. He argues that all truth is based upon the absolute personality of God (24ff). It is the person of God who is the truth. He is the truth, the foundational axiom of all things and He created truth and meaning. If we would know the truth, we need to have a relationship with this personal God.

Jesus’ words to Pilate show there is truth and that He bears witness to the truth.

3. Impersonal and Personal Truth

Christianity teaches that all things are based upon a personal God. Behind all things is God the creator, sustainer and redeemer of all things. Paul states this in Acts 17:25: *“Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.”* This contrasts strongly with the impersonal savoirs put forwards in many philosophies, some impersonal abstracts.

John Frame (35) puts it as follows: The great question confronting modern humanity is this: granted that the universe contains both personal (like you and me), and impersonal structures (like matter, motion, chance, time space and physical laws),

which is more fundamental? Is the impersonal aspect grounded upon the personal, or is it the other way around.

Most Western and Eastern philosophies stress that the impersonal is the ultimate, and the personal is derived from the impersonal. According to Greek thought, while it has personal deities—local gods who exercise some power—behind them lies impersonal fate. Buddhism finds its ultimate in the Creation and karma. Islam finds it absolutely in god, but one who is so capricious as to be effectively without a personality and unknowable.

The same thing is true in the Mayan religion of Mexico and Central America. Here there are many local gods and deities, the rain god for example, but behind all of these local and lesser gods is the ultimate true God. Since He is behind these lesser gods, He is unknowable through the lesser gods who represent Him. As one who is behind and distant, there is a belief that we cannot really know Him or understand Him.

Science tries to study the natural world in order to gain ultimate understanding. Reason, logic, and mathematics begin with the impersonal and stay in the impersonal. They start from an impersonal world (their fundamental axiom is the Creation) and assume an impersonal and yet somehow rational universe. Almost every religion or philosophy today is based upon an impersonal view of truth and Creation. Pantheism is a powerful and widely held philosophy that argues that the Creation—all material things—is in fact God. The ultimate force in the universe is therefore neither living nor personal, it is the Creation.

This focus on the impersonal Creation, rather than the Creator, is a product of the Fall. Paul describes this shift in Romans 1:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the Creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen” (Rom. 1:18-24).

The Scriptures teach that men have to worship something. Since the Creator/Creation split is foundational to the cosmos and since the Fall men no longer worship God, the only other thing men can do is focus upon the Creation.

In discussing the Creator/creature personal, impersonal division Frame points out that it is simple to show that the personal creates, shapes and directs the impersonal and material (35). To use a simple illustration, men build buildings; they create and make material objects. Men pursue science. They order the world and create history.

The impersonal earth does not control personal man; rather, personal man controls impersonal earth.

This is consistent with the Scriptures. In Genesis 1, man is commanded to take dominion over the Creation. In doing so, personal man is reflecting God the personal Creator. Without personality the Creation has no understanding or meaning. When scientists and other evolutionists give the ultimate meaning to the impersonal or to chance, they are contradicting the clear evidence before their eyes.¹²

3.1. Impersonal Truth and Irrationalism

An impersonal Creation is an irrational one. It is one in which chance rules. Everything is merely atoms and random events. In an impersonal universe, chance and chaos are the only realities and nothing can have any ultimate meaning. Every use of reason can only be built on random atoms and blind fate. In such a world, there would be no rationality, no ultimate morality, no consequences, meaning or purpose.

The great Christian message is that since the Creator God is personal, rational and sovereign, there is ground to build meaning and an understanding of the truth. The Sovereign God creates and gives meaning and value to the Creation. Only as we enter into a relationship with Him in and through His Son can we can find meaning and truth. In God we see One who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. In His works He relates to us by a Covenant in which He shows His justice, righteousness, compassion and forgiveness. Through the covenant we are responsible to Him and are given meaning and structure, morality and purpose.

4. "Absolute" Personality

Frame (38-39) argues that when we speak of God and truth, we need to stress that He is both personal and absolute (34-40). He initiates all things; therefore, nothing can be more fundamental or basic than He is. This concept is unique to the Christian religion and Creation illustrates this truth. It is the everlasting, absolute, all-powerful, spiritual God who creates all things from nothing. When applied to providence, it means that God fully upholds and controls all Creation. Nothing happens that He has not willed. All of history is fully and completely controlled by Him. He has a plan, a purpose, and He is working out that purpose in history. Ephesians 1:11 states: *"In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will."*

¹² In this section we have begun to use the Reformed apologetic method. We have begun to isolate the basis of the unbeliever's philosophy and to attack it working out the implications of his thought in showing such a world would have no purpose, value or meaning. We have also shown that this position is contrary to common sense and the general revelation we see around us. We have also had the opportunity to develop the second wing of apologetics, a positive presentation, a witness to the consistency between Creation and the Scriptures. In this argument we have been able to present that God is personal, that His person controls all things, that He desires to relate to us; indeed His love is so great that He would give His only Son for us.

The wonderful news is that this plan is currently in the hands of His Son, Jesus Christ, the God Man.

“And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?’ And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. But one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.’ And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne” (Rev. 5:1-7).

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen” (Matt. 28:18-20).

In Hebrews God says clearly there is none greater than Himself:

“For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, ‘Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.’ And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all disputes. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath” (Heb. 6:13-17).

The absolute personality of God can be contrasted with Greek or Hindu thought on the divine. These religions have many gods, but none of them is all-powerful. As we already noted in Romans 1 above, behind the worship of all birds and animals lies the worship of the impersonal creator.

4.1. The Personal Nature of God and the Trinity

God is not only personal, He is Trinitarian and this has important implications for our understanding of Creation.

In the Old Testament we see a God who speaks, interacts, plans and relates to man and Israel. In Genesis 1:26, God takes council with Himself in the Creation of man: *“Let us make man in our own image.”* In the garden, God walked and talked to Adam: *“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (Gen. 3:8).*

Throughout the Old Testament God is speaking to the children of Israel. Since God is revealed in and through His works, and His greater work is that of sending His Son to save men, we see a greater revelation of God in the New Testament.

“When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’” (Matt. 3:16, 17).

Matthew shows the Father speaking to His Son. Jesus is clearly personal. The Spirit is also present, descending as a dove. The personhood of the Spirit is shown in Acts 5:1-11 and Ephesians 4:30. All of these passages speak of the triune and personal nature of God.

4.2. The Importance of the Trinity for Apologetics¹³

There are a number of important apologetic implications of God being personal and triune.

First, the Trinitarian God is a mystery that cannot be explained. How can God be one (Deut. 6:4, Isa. 44:6); yet, the Father be God, the Son be God and the Spirit be God? Trinity illustrates our limitations when speaking of God. We need to recognize that we are dependent upon His self-revelation and there are things we cannot understand. Logic and the human mind are always to be submissive to His revelation of Himself in the Scriptures. We are always to be humble before God and listen to His word, not our own thoughts. We are to always keep an element of humility before God who can never fully be known. Job 11:7 states: *“Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?”* When men come to God, they must come to Him with that attitude. A God that we could fully explain is not a big god at all.

Second, God always was in fellowship. The theology of the Trinity helps us to understand the verse *“God is love”*. The Triune God has always loved each other. God’s very nature is to be in a loving fellowship.

This truth is reflected in the Creation of mankind. Man is made in His image, male and female (Gen.1:26). Adam is placed in the garden but he is alone. God then brings Eve to him. The relationship between man and woman reflects God’s image. The foundation of God and the foundation of man in His image is personal and relational.

The interpersonal relationship between the Trinity, particularly that between the Father and the Son, assures us that we can know Him. If these things were not real or not disclosed to us, God would be someone very different to us, and someone we cannot really know. Unitarianism and Islam point to something that is distinctly different: that we never really know who God is.

Third, the fact that God has always been in Trinitarian fellowship leads us to the idea that God is separate and independent of Creation. There was no need for God to make the Creation, as the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is self-sufficient. The decision to create the world was born of His gracious free choice. His interaction with the Creation is also one of grace. The privilege of man is that due to the work of God, we can join into that fellowship. As John says, *“that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ”* (1 John 1:3).

¹³ Donald Macleod develops these points in his book *The Shared Life*, p. 41-43.

Finally, it must be said that God is complete or blessed in Himself. God is happy, free from all cares, worries and the like, and is at peace, with joy and harmony. 1 Timothy 1:11 states: *according to the glorious Gospel of the blessed God that was committed to my trust.*

This aspect of God being complete in Himself is reflected in the Creation. As God takes delight in Himself, so He takes delight in the work of His Creation. He pronounces the work “good” on the sixth day in Genesis 1:31. He delights in the work of His Son, Mark 1:11, and He delights in the work of His church. Jude 24 states: *Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless, before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.*

Most non-Christian systems of thought lead us very quickly to monotheism, which in turn leads us to pantheism. God is not separate from the Creation, but the Creation is linked to God and is upheld by His power (Heb. 1:3).

5. Fully Orbed Truth/Word View

The idea that the truth is personal and reflects the diversity of the Trinity (as well as being a story per lesson one) influences what truth we should include in reasoning with the unbeliever. I will explain this by making a distinction between a narrow approach to the truth, and a broad approach to the truth (Frame 14).

5.1. A Narrow Approach to Truth

Classical apologetics generally focus upon narrow truth. It focuses upon what some see as essential truth—something that seems so secure that it cannot be contradicted. The idea is that if we can find something foundational, then no one can contradict it. Since no one can contradict it, it becomes something that everyone agrees with, a middle ground. Classical apologetics then states that from this narrow axiom we can go on to make assertions/proofs that will prove other aspects of Christianity.

Some Christians appeal to fixed rules of logic; then, from this basic axiom they seek to prove a Creator. A non-Christian who used this approach was Descartes. He reasoned that if he could find one thing so foundational that it could not be contradicted, from there, he could reason out and make a complete system of thought. Descartes thought that he found the one central axiom in the idea ‘I think, therefore I am’. Descartes’ proof for a philosophy of life began from a very narrow axiom and then worked outwards.

A number of Christian apologetics stress this type of thinking by turning to logic, the law of non-contradiction or other narrow, so called “incontrovertible truths”. This creates a central axiom, an incontrovertible foundation, and from this position they then attempt to prove God’s existence.

5.2. Broad aspect of Truth

The Scriptures never talk about proving God from such limited axioms. Since the Scriptures do not use this type of reasoning, neither should we.

The real reason for rejecting this approach is that incontrovertible, fundamental truth of God is found in every part of the Creation. God has revealed Himself in Creation

and the whole heavens and the earth bear witness and testimony in a direct, immediate and incontrovertible way to the glory of God (Rom. 1:18-22). To look for narrow incontrovertible axioms, whether implied or expressed, denies this approach.

Another aspect of broad truth is to see that the Scriptures also offer a complete worldview, a way of seeing the world. They do this by telling a story: the story or genealogy of the heavens and the earth, the story of man, the story of the Fall and the story of Christ coming to undo the effects of sin and death. In the life of Jesus we see that apologetics is a story; it is the story with a beginning, middle and end. It is a history. At the very center of that history is the wisdom of God in Christ. The Scriptures do not offer limited provable axioms; rather, they offer a complete worldview in the form of a story.

5.3. Scriptures As a Lens Through Which We See

The Scriptures speak of truth in an integrated, holistic way; it offers a complete and full perspective. When we humble ourselves under them, they give another complete perspective. The Scriptures operate like lenses of a glass. Glasses allow us to see, to gain perspective and clarity upon our situation. If we use the Scriptures to interpret our situation, we do the same thing. Scripture lenses give us a very distinct way of looking at the world. It interprets and colors what we see. Without this coloring, we cannot understand the Creation. We cannot give it its true and full meaning. The Scriptures describe the Creation and tells us how we are to live and respond to God's story in the world. The Scriptures are both descriptive and prescriptive.

5.4. Apologetics: an Appeal to the Whole Man

In our appeal to man, the whole of man is a target—his heart, mind, conscience, emotions—not merely the mind. It is a failure of classical Western apologetics that it focuses upon the mind and reason (the narrow view of truth) in apologetics. Since the Scripture deals with the whole man, we must also focus on the whole man.

An illustration: As I was attending to the death of a relative, her non-believing daughter spoke to me about how hard death was and how emotionally upsetting it was. I agreed and pointed out her feelings were correct, death was evil. I used her feelings to explain that death was not something natural to man; moreover, death and the consequences of death were something to be feared. I pointed out how many people try to speak of death as being just a part of life, but that view does not fit our experience. The whole of life teaches us that death is alien, frightening and terrible. By using her emotions I had gone to the heart of man's problem in life, sin and death. I had also shown that the Scriptures have a more realistic view of death than the philosophies of the world.

I then turned to the positive part of apologetics, the presentation of the truth and hope of the Gospel. I lead her to a biblical story that was similar to her own, the story of Lazarus. In John 11, Jesus, Mary and Martha are struggling with the sickness and the death of Lazarus. We see the reality of their pain, the reality of death and their need for help. This story shows that the true solution to death is not by accepting it, ignoring it, or pretending it is just part of life; rather, the resolution is the work of Jesus and the power of the resurrection. We also see that Jesus Himself will have to enter death to conquer it, and that He has done so to set us free.

This story appeals to the emotional aspect of man. It stressed the pain, hurt and confusion that death brings, but it also pointed to the good news of the Gospel. This was not an intellectual argument, but it was an argument based upon the whole man.

A second illustration: Recently while I was driving in Belize City, Craig and I met a woman who said she needed a savior. Now that was recognition that something was wrong, that she needed something, and that she was unhappy. This was an emotional response but it allowed us to say to her, "Yes, something is wrong; the Bible calls it sin. It entered in the Garden of Eden and now man is unhappy with himself, he is full of guilt, and he is at war with himself and others." Again the Christian can say, "We have the answer, the Bible says that this is the reason for these things. Are these things true in your own experience? If so, then this is the answer."

6. Truth, Knowledge and Submission to God

When the Christian talks about truth to an unbeliever, what he is stressing is the need to submit to God's revelation about himself, the need to humble himself before God's word.

God gives us the truth in a range of ways.

First, due to us being created beings, we can only come to a true knowledge of ourselves as we understand God, the Creation and our place in it. All our experiences, emotions and thoughts have to be analyzed and compared with God's own word. God's own word must control our experiences; experiences do not control the word as there is always the temptation to let our experiences control the word of God, instead of letting the word of God control and inform our experiences.

This can be illustrated by the period in which Joseph was in prison. In his sufferings, had he placed his experiences above the word of God, he would have thought that God was not faithful and that God had forgotten him. Instead, Joseph was called to humble himself under the word of God until God's promises to him came true.

Second, we must be aware that due to the Fall, grace is our source of knowledge. God does not have to speak to us; He does so now only in and through grace. To know then is to receive humbly from God and ask Him to teach us. Grace is the only true source of knowledge. We come to know Him because He delivers us (Ex. 33:12ff.).

Finally, it is man's duty to submit to God's revelation. It is only as man submits to the Scriptures that he will begin to understand and find truth.

7. The Escape from Truth/Irrationalism

Recently in Western philosophies there has been a movement away from any claim to absolute truth.

In Francis Schaffer's book *The Escape from Reason*, Dr Schaffer argues that over the last 500 years there has been a general movement away from trying to find the ultimate meaning of life and truth, and an acceptance of the position that there is no

ultimate truth, or that ultimate truth cannot be found. In many ways he felt that philosophy had undergone a fundamental shift.

This is now the accepted position in the West today. Philosophers now propose alternative ways of talking about truth and absolutes. Instead of talking about truth, they speak of justified beliefs.

There are three principle variations of this.

First, there are some who simply say that they will chose a foundational norm and then give it authority. This offers them a foundational set of beliefs, something from which they can build.

Second, some merely try to establish some sort of rational procedure – sometimes called tradition-based fallibilism. This claims no ultimate truth, no statement that is absolute, but it does give a framework to operate from. In simple terms it is the idea that we have always done things this way; therefore, we will continue to do things this way; or this is the way my culture does this– it might be right, it might be wrong, but it is my tradition.

A further variation is called reliableism. Here we are not claiming something is true, but we are claiming it is reliable. Like tradition-based fallibilism, it makes no absolute claim upon the truth; however, unlike fallibilism, it can change over time. What might be reliable today might not be reliable tomorrow. The true test of anything in this variation: Is it reliable at this present time?

In each case there is movement away from truth to a justified belief. This does not answer the ultimate questions.

Conclusion

The foundation of all truth is not impersonal, but personal, since the Triune God is the foundation of all things. This is reflected in Creation. When speaking to an unbelievers, rather than present a narrow view to him, we are to present him with a worldview. In the last 100 years in the West, philosophy has given up on trying to find any ultimate meaning.

Summary

The great aim of apologetics is to find the truth. Since God is absolute and personal, truth is God's and is only to be found in a relationship with Him. The Trinity is foundational to our understanding of who we are. We learn that truth by submission to God and His word. Every aspect of the whole of Creation is a valid basis for apologetics. I have included a list of Books in the footnotes ¹⁴

¹⁴ For a fuller critique of foundationism, see Nicholas Wolterstoff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*. For suggestions with dialoging with relativism, see Plasher, *An Unapologetic Theology*. A useful book in speaking to Atheists is David Bentley Hart's *Atheist Delusions*. An interesting book in helping with Muslims is [Nabeel T Jabbour](#), *The Crescent through the Eyes of the Cross* and a simple introduction to speaking to Muslims is William Miller, *A Christian's Response to Islam*.

Lesson Three Questions

1. Do we live in a personal or impersonal universe?
2. What do we mean by “absolute personality”?
3. Name 4 important implications of the Trinity.
4. What is narrow rational truth?
5. What is wide truth or worldview?
6. Explain how the Scriptures act as a lens.
7. Explain how apologetics can appeal to the emotions.
8. Why does the Christian need revelation?
9. Do we have original or derived knowledge; what are they and what is the implication of derived knowledge?
10. What is Schaffer’s claim in *Escape from Reason*?

Lesson Four. The Nature of Man, The Fall, Sin and the Implications for Apologetics

1. Introduction

Theology controls our apologetic method and this lesson focuses upon that theology. The focus of this lesson is the doctrine of man, particularly the fact that man is a created being and that since the Fall man is fallen and corrupt. These two facts have major implications for what man can know and also what man wants to know. Unless we understand man, we will not understand the apologetic task.

2. The Need for Revelation

Man needs help in order to understand God, himself and the Creation. Man was never made to understand truth or interpret truth, the environment or Creation without God's help. In the garden before the Fall, God spoke to Adam explaining his role and setting limits upon his actions. Man has never been autonomous and has always needed God's aid.

God's commands were linked to faith. God spoke and Adam was required to obey. There was no independent way that Adam could check or verify the truth of God's word other than obeying it or disobeying it. God reveals, and man is asked to follow His revelation.

The Scriptures also stress the need for the Spirit to enable fallen man to understand Him. Paul states:

"For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:11-14).

Both the fact that God reveals Himself and that after the Fall God needs to send His Spirit, stresses that it is God who teaches and leads men. If man is to understand God or the Creation, he must have God's help. This must be stressed to both the believer and the unbeliever.

3. Man in the Image of God

Genesis 1:26, 27 states that man is made in the image/likeness of God. This likeness allowed man to know and love God. The image of God in man finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus, the God-man, whose coming in the flesh shows the closeness of the identification between both parties. In Christ we see that we can know and relate to God. Jesus explains the closeness of the relationship in John's gospel stating: *"Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father?'" (John 14:9)*

3.1. How and What Man Knows—Derived Knowledge

Theologians speak of three ways that we can know. First, we can say we know in exactly the same way that God knows. In order for this to be true it would mean that our knowledge of things is total, completely objective and complete. It is objective, knowledge without bias and one which does not increase over time. This is clearly not possible. A second possibility is that we can have no true knowledge of God and Creation. In the light of John 14:9 this is clearly not true. The third possibility is that we can have what is called *analogous knowledge*, a knowledge that is true and yet is still distinct from God's knowledge of the Creation. This is the most commonly accepted idea.

Man's knowledge's is distinct from God's in that it is derived and interpretive. God knows all things as the Creator and Ruler. Man's knowledge is analogical (like an analogy). It is derivative, incomplete, and never exhaustive. Man is always learning, growing, correcting; moreover, since man is in God's image, his knowledge is capable of being true and accurate

Man thinks analogously because God created him to rule the earth. God alone created things *Ex Nilo*, so He alone understands them fully and exhaustively. In contrast, man is given the job of ruling this earth for God, so his understanding comes from the things that God created and revealed. Due to this, man is non-exhaustive and always makes corrections in his judgment. Because man is both part of the world that God created and is finite, he will never have the ability to see things as God sees things. Pure objectivity is impossible.

"Human interpretation is a secondary Creation; yet if we walk in obedience to the Scripture in immersion, we will see far more. Scripture trains us – it trains the imagination. It generates interpretive frameworks for guiding experience. Scripture is the means for cultivating Christian understanding. Our interpretation must always conform to God's. We are never neutral, we never stand in pure objectivity, we cannot. Only God can be truly objective, for He is outside the system" (Payne).

Man's position as "created" means that the only way he can be told the truth is to be told it by the Creator. The word of God is essential to man's understanding. Converted man listens to that word; fallen man rejects it. Fallen man tries to be God. He tries to put himself in the position of the Creator. He seeks to have complete, objective, original knowledge (this is impossible). He also seeks to understand without God's word; consequently, because he will not listen, he lacks the tools to properly understand God's world.

4. Eve's Temptation and Knowledge

We turn now to the temptation of Eve. First, Eve's temptation involved knowledge. Second, the first temptation is a pattern which shows how all temptations occur. Third, since the wages of sin is more sin of the same type, the temptation and the effect of this also continues to all men. Men continue to sin in the same manner.

We will see that the pattern of Eve's temptations follows 3.1. Eve sinned as she stopped trying to interpret things according to God's word, in a derived manner. Instead she relied upon her own sight, upon evidence, logic and understanding. The principle verses are Genesis 3:1-5, 2 Corinthians 11:3 and 1 Timothy 2:14.

“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate” (Gen. 3:1-7).

“But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3).

“And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Tim. 2:14).

Eve is in the garden and Satan tempts her. She is offered the choice of submitting to the authority of God’s word to her—based upon the presumption that God knows best—or she can listen to the Devil’s words. She listens to the Devil. She trusts her own personal investigation. Ultimately, Eve’s choice rested upon her own reasoning, senses and experience (*Van Til’s Apologetic* 96, 97).

Eve placed her own judgment above that of God’s word: “She saw it was good for food, pleasing to the eye.” To the senses it felt good, and it was desirable to make one wise. Eve made three decisions: 1. Eve would not submit to God’s word. 2. She affirmed she had an equal right to decide on the rightness and wrongness of an action. 3. She trusted in her own judgment. In this process she became autonomous—interpreting, deciding and acting independently of God. According to Paul, Eve was deceived.

Sinners today attempt to use the same logic. They try to decide what is right, what is moral, and what is true based not upon the word of God, but upon their own understanding and investigation of the matter. They seek to prove their case by reason, logic and evidence, just like Eve. Unfortunately, man’s apologetics have fallen into the same trap. Instead of acknowledging the authority of God’s word, something that needs to be submitted to in order to know, they seek to find a starting point in the middle, a place from which they could reason to the truth. As the middle ground is something that is autonomous from God—a place independent of Him and His word—they have fallen into the same trap as Eve. They have made themselves judges of what is acceptable and what is not. They are trying to create an independent authority.

5. The Fall, Sin, Total Depravity and Apologetics

While Eve’s temptation and deception are important, the fact and nature of Adam’s fall is more important. Adam, in a deliberate act of rebellion, rejected the word of God and took of the tree and ate. As Paul says, Adam was not deceived (1 Tim. 2:14). Adam deliberately rejected God’s place as Lord over Creation and took that role for himself. Due to original sin, Adam’s position as federal head and representative, this

hatred of and refusal to bow to God remains in the heart of each man. Man is in rebellion against God and hostile to Him. Romans 8:7 states: *“For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.”* This is known as the doctrine of total depravity.

5.1. Westminster Confession of Faith¹⁵

The doctrine of total depravity is explained in the Westminster Standards in Chapter 6. Extracts of Chapter 6 are provided below.

Chapter 6.2. By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body.

Chapter 6.3. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation.

Chapter 6.4. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.

Chapter 6.5. The fall, willful rebellion of man now affects every part of his being. Theologically, this is called original sin.

5.2. Scriptural Proof of Total Depravity

Total depravity affects every part of the life of man. Both man’s mind and heart are affected by sin.

The Mind: Romans 8:7 *“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.”*

1 Corinthians 2:13 *“These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”*

These verses show that the fallen mind of man is not neutral in matters of religion; rather, fallen man’s mind is hostile and actively rejects any truth concerning God.

The Heart: Genesis 6:5 *“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”*

Genesis 8:21 *“And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.’”*

¹⁵ The Westminster Standards are the official standards of the Presbyterian Church of America, as well as numerous other Presbyterian bodies. For the full text and other related documents go to <http://www.opc.org/confessions.html>. For a brief history go to <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WestminsterConfessionofFaith>.

Proverbs 1:7 *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”*

Proverbs 1:29 *“Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD,”*

The heart of man, the center of his religious life, likewise will not accept God's claims. These and other verses show that man is alienated from God; he is alienated from himself and he is in warfare with God. Man's attitude is not natural. It is one of active hostility. It is not that man does not know and need convincing through evidence or logic; it is a state of mind that must be converted. According to Paul men know but choose to suppress the truth.

5.3. Man's Suppression of the Truth

In Romans 1:18-22 Paul shows sinful man's true spiritual state.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the Creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.”

Paul draws out a number of points.

1. Wrath of God is revealed to all men: The wrath of God is described as His justice according to the law, not capriciousness. His wrath is a positive action flowing from His justice. Further, the wrath described here is of the same type and nature to that which will be revealed on the last day. It is a precursor.

“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,” (Rom. 2:8) *“but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath,”* (Rom. 2:5)

“But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.)” (Rom. 3:5)

2. The Reason for God's Wrath: Paul stresses that the wrath of God is revealed against men for their personal actions. The wrath of God is poured upon men because they know the truth of God (His revelation is clear to each one of us); yet, they deliberately choose to reject His revelation. Man's rejection is summarized by the idea that men have not been thankful and did not glorify Him. (Rom. 1:21)

God's revelation of Himself to mankind is described in two phrases: it has been revealed to them (1:18); it has been shown to them. (1:9) The phrases stress that God is actively revealing Himself to man through Creation and providence. The words “He has shown Himself” occur 49 times in the New Testament. This can be seen in 1 Timothy 3:16, Titus 1:3, 2 Timothy 1:10, Hebrews 9:26, and 1 Peter 1:20.

3. Revelation occurs through two primary means, Creation and the conscience of man.

A. The Creation: The Creation is a testimony to God and His nature. The visible Creation reflects the invisible attributes of God, even His eternal power and glory. If He is the creator of space, time and matter, He must be eternal.

B. The inward testimony of man created in His image: The second witness is the inward testimony in man: the image of God that has still not been fully eradicated. Paul addresses this in Romans 2:14-16:

“for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.”

Both man’s inner being—his heart and conscience—as well as the Creation reveal God to man.

4. The Real nature of Sin; Hostility, Avoidance and Active Denial

Paul describes the real nature of sin in two broad terms: man’s ungodliness and unrighteousness. Both point to the reality that man has failed to discharge his obligations to God. This is manifested in two particular ways: man is not thankful, and he does not glorify God. Thankfulness is based upon the need for a debt to be paid; glorification is based upon the fear of God, to render an appropriate response due to His own glory. These characterize the whole of the life of man. Paul states that they know Him. They are without excuse. They have sinned and they know that they are under His wrath and curse, and this leads to their response—their suppression of the truth.

5. The Response—Suppression of the Truth

In response to man’s sin and God’s revealed wrath, man actively suppresses the truth. Man resorts to active denial to avoid the reality of his own position. Paul describes this action as suppression of the truth, to change and to exchange the truth for a lie. Each word is an active deliberate act of man. They “hold back”, strive to stop; they “resist” God’s revelation to them. This is not a question of men not understanding, nor having all the facts, or they would turn to Him in love. They have enough facts to condemn themselves; they would rather not deal with those facts.

Men follow this denial with a rationalization of their true position, they suppress and they substitute. In Romans 1:23 and 25, Paul states that they:

“changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things” (Rom. 1:23).

“who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen” (Rom. 1:25).

In the change or exchange, man chooses to put something else in God’s place. If man could, he would seek to erase all knowledge of God from his conscience. It is important to see that man possesses and yet suppresses. Man is made in the image of God and the Creation itself bears witness to God; thus, the testimony of God is unmistakable (Ps. 19). Men are truth possessors, who by sinning have become truth suppressors.

Scripture indicates that this active suppression of the truth manifests itself in a number of different ways. Sometimes man will simply deny the truth (Gen. 2:4; John 5:38). Sometimes he is said to hold the truth back (2 Pet. 3:5). Sometimes man is depicted as knowing what to do, but refusing to do it (Matt. 23:2ff). Man also twists the truth, using God's own word to oppose Him (Matt. 4:7-10).

6. Man's Strange Relationship to God and Creation

Fallen man now occupies a strange position. Since man is still in God's image, his original function to subdue and rule the earth remains. However, instead of action for God, he now does things for his own glory. Man continues to function as he was created to do, but now his actions are twisted away from God. Man's fallen position is illustrated by the story of the tower of Babel.

"Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.' But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, 'Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.' So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth" (Gen. 11:1-19).

In Genesis, man was given dominion over all the earth. He was to bring it into subjection to himself, for it to bear fruit to God. After the Fall, man's desire to take dominion remains but now it is twisted so that he seeks dominion for himself—for his own glory— not for the glory of God.

Mankind continues to operate this twisted middle world, creating stress and tension. Like little children sitting upon the lap of their Father, they are supported and sustained by Him; yet, they will not submit to Him and they continuously seek to be independent from Him. God restrains them, denying them their ultimate desires (Gen. 11:7). In His sovereign might, God uses even their evil actions to accomplish His purposes. While man is in the business of denying God, God in His sovereign will and power is denying man. Psalm 76:10 speaks of God using His power to overrule men's wickedness, "surely the wrath of man shall praise You; With the remainder of wrath You shall gird Yourself."

7. Common Grace

We turn now to the issue of common grace. Some have suggested that common grace creates a common ground, a neutral meeting point between believers and unbelievers from which a believer may present the Gospel. Does common grace work in the nonbeliever so that he might be open to receiving the truth?

Common grace does not create an apologetic point of contact. Common grace is restraining grace: the grace God gives the sinner because he has no ability to stop himself from being as bad as he could be. Common grace is not a positive empowerment, creating a bridge, rather it is a restraint.

The wording of common grace is deceptive. Common grace means God's purposes towards someone. To the believers, it is the gift of God's grace to fulfill God's desires in him in making him into the image of God. In a similar way, the gifts of rain and sunshine to unbelievers are gifts to those who God hates, but they are given because they have need of those things to fulfill the purposes that God has for them. God gave Pharaoh life and ability to rule, so that Pharaoh might accomplish God's purposes.

God's actions allow the wicked and the righteous to live in this world, so that His purposes in both might be worked out. In the parable, both the wheat and the tares receive rain and sunshine. Both grow: the wheat for glory on the Day of Judgment, the tares to be pulled out and separated on that day.

We must also recognize that there is some attitude of favor that God has to the wicked. In Luke 19:41, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem: "Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it." God strives with men in Genesis 6:3: "And the LORD said, '*My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.*'" In Matthew 5 being good to your enemies is to be like the Father in Heaven.

Van Till points out that God's common grace is also a witness to the Creation concerning His being (Acts 14:16). Through this witness men are without excuse (*Van Til's Apologetics* 427).

Conclusion

In order to know how to speak to an unbeliever, we need to understand who man is and what his place is in God's world. Man is created by God and therefore derives all his knowledge from God's revelation to him. Furthermore, the fall of man means that man is hostile—at enmity to God—and will not submit to Him. He suppresses the truth. It is the job of the believer to show the unbeliever his true state and to show him God's grace in the Gospel of God. There is no middle ground upon which God and man agree.

Summary

Man, as a created being, needs God to reveal truth to him. Without this, he cannot know God or the truth. Due to the Fall, man is now totally corrupt; he is at enmity towards God. He is not looking to be reasoned with; rather, he knows God's wrath and judgment is upon him and so he is actively suppressing the truth about himself and God. Due to this, we cannot talk about man being neutral or looking for a neutral ground to argue men into the kingdom. Without the aid of God's spirit working in man, men will not submit to God.

Lesson Four Questions

1. What two things aid man in his understanding of the truth?
2. How can man understand God?
3. What do we mean by saying man's knowledge is interpretive and derivative?
4. In Eve's temptation, what did she place above the Word?
5. What are the consequences of total depravity for apologetics?
6. What is the importance of Romans 1? According to Romans 1, what is man's position before God?
7. How does the Westminster Confession define original sin?
8. In Romans 1, what does it mean to suppress the truth?
9. What do we learn about man from the story of the tower of Babel?
10. Define common grace?

Lesson Five. A Biblical Method of Apologetics, Paul at Athens

1. Introduction

The preceding sections have laid a theoretical apologetics but in this section we focus upon the 'How to' of apologetics. We begin with a look at Paul's preaching at Athens, followed by some helpful thoughts about how to bear witness to the truth and finally we will look at the extent and limits of apologetics.

2. Paul in Athens

Acts 17, Paul's own defense of Christianity in Athens, is an important passage in discussing apologetics. The passage shows us Paul is speaking formally (he is speaking in the Areopagus, a formal court in Athens) and he is declaring he Gospel to those with no real understanding of Christianity (Paul spoke differently to the Jew than he did to the Gentile). These two factors highlight Paul's personal apologetic method.

Since this is a long passage we will break it down into sections.¹⁶

2.1. The Philosophical/Intellectual Background to the Conflict

"While Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, 'What does this babbler want to say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,' because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, 'May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean.' For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing" (Acts 17:16-23).

These verses introduce the conflict between Paul and the Athenian philosophers. These background verses show the importance of the event. From the Greek side, the Areopagus was a formal court within Athens, the intellectual capital of the Greek world. Paul is called to give a considered, formal and legal defense of Christianity—one that he is uniquely qualified to do. The apostle Paul is the preeminent missionary and one of the greatest minds in the early church. As a citizen of Tarsus (Acts 21:39) and resident of Jerusalem, he was fully trained in Greek and Jewish thought. As Christ's apostle to the Gentiles, he is the church's principle apologist. Paul is uniquely qualified, and this is a unique opportunity to study his method.

As we consider Paul's method we will see that Paul does not try to reason with them from either a neutral stance or from within their worldview. He also does not focus upon the specific question they ask concerning the resurrection. Paul's presentation

¹⁶ This section is a short summary from Bahnsen's *Always Ready*.

focuses upon the underlying worldviews or theological presuppositions of thought from the Hebrew and Greek world. He realizes that there are two different and competing worldviews in collision.

2.2. Paul's Method – A Complete Worldview

“Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, “For we are also His offspring.” Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:22).

Paul offered his defense in a way that was both respectful and gentle. In this he follows Peter's injunction in 1 Peter 3:15. In Paul's defense, he first critiques their position, showing its inconsistency and inadequacy, and then gives a clear positive statement of the truth.

Paul's critique of their worldview

Paul exploits their ignorance of biblical truth in a number of ways. He uses the statue of the “unknown God” to point to the gaps and inadequacy of their own worldview, gaps that they themselves acknowledge. When Paul presents Gospel truth, he offers a whole Christian worldview. The authority for Paul's arguments is based firmly upon the Old Testament. He does not resort to Greek philosophy and thinking to prove his worldview. While Paul does not directly quote the Old Testament (as he does when preaching to the Jews in Antioch, Acts 13:16-37), he does use Old Testament concepts and language when preaching.

Paul exposes their internal tension, their acknowledged contradiction in that they speak of an “unknown God”. They recognize that there is a God; nonetheless, they do not know Him. Paul builds upon this to proclaim the true and living God. Paul shows them that their own worldview is inadequate. He also points out their inconsistency; they liken the divine being to gold and silver; yet, they call themselves his ‘offspring’. In each instance, Paul exploits the weaknesses in their worldview and attacks their presuppositions.

Paul's positive presentation of the Gospel

Paul makes a clear and full declaration of the truth. As we have noted, although asked specifically about the resurrection, Paul does not limit himself to this area; rather, he argues from the whole of all the scriptures including creation, providence and redemption. This allows him to give a full witness to the truth of the Gospel. By the time he has finished, Paul has strongly contrasted the false Greek worldview and the true worldview of the Scriptures.

Paul gives authority to revealed knowledge. They are ignorant, but he claims absolute authority to speak to them. This is consistent with Ephesians 4:18-20, in which Paul affirms that the Gentiles live in ignorance, while believers renewed by grace have true knowledge. Through this speech, Paul draws heavily upon the truth and worldview of the Old Testament. He does not enter into the Greek worldview and argue from that perspective.

Paul also stresses their guilt. He states that they are culpably suppressing the truth. They had general revelation; yet, they had misused it by turning to idols. Paul states the truth of God was evident to them, from both Creation and providence; yet, they have corrupted it. (26-28) Paul's argument mirrors Romans 1:18-22 and Acts 14:17 in which he says, *"Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."* Paul clearly makes the point that God's governance of history should lead men to seek Him that they might find Him; yet, in sin they have not done so. The evil of their suppressing the truth is also to be seen in Paul's call to them to repent. Acts 17:30: *"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,"*

2. 3. The Effect of Paul's Preaching

"And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, 'We will hear you again on this matter.' So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them" (Acts 17:32-34).

In summary, Paul's method was to preach the Gospel. Paul did not limit himself to one or two specifics; rather, he presented a complete worldview. A few Athenians did believe, showing that God honored this simple, direct and scriptural defense of the truth. Paul rested upon the sovereignty of God in evangelism.

3. Using Paul's Method

Paul's defense was given in a formal legal and structured environment. This offered him a chance to give a full and structured defense, something that is difficult to do in regular conversation. His defense can be broken down into two parts, a negative one and a positive one. The negative aspect is his challenge to the Greeks concerning their own system of thought. Paul then put forwards a clear and full explanation of the Christian worldview and Gospel. The use of a negative critique and a positive presentation of the truth is a useful technique. When we witness to the Gospel, we are to challenge the unbeliever to assess his own beliefs and presuppositions. We are also to call for a response. Our order may change in a more informal conversational setting, but the technique of negative and positive will remain.

3.1. The Negative

In the negative stage we expose and break down the unbeliever's worldview. We are showing the unbeliever the true nature of his position, one that he may not understand himself. As we do so, we stress that the unbeliever really has no basis for holding those beliefs and that whatever structures he has are radically inconsistent. We show the unbeliever his sin and that he is self-deceived and has given himself over to a lie. We expose that lie. In this process we must recognize that many unbelievers have never directly thought through these issues. We should also recognize that everyone works on different levels of consistency; some may see the inconsistency of their positions and be troubled by them, others may not. This will vary from person to person.

3.2. The Positive

In the positive side of apologetics we put forwards our Christian worldview and apologetic. Here we begin by laying down our presuppositions, by explaining the basis of our authority and the way we think. At this time we can lay the biblical basis of God, Creation, the nature of man, the doctrine of sin, the Christian doctrine of salvation and the final judgment, with heaven and hell. These doctrines are the basis of our worldviews.

Once we have established the basis, we can then apply these to the issue of life which the unbeliever is facing. If one is struggling with sin, we can explain the biblical doctrine of sin and its remedies. Whatever the issue is, we now have a way to explain it in a biblical manner. This is a positive display of the Gospel to the unbeliever exhorting him to believe the Word and come to Christ.

As a final aspect, we can show how the Creation perfectly fits the word we are given in Scripture, the consistency between God's word to us in Scripture and the Creation itself. While we will not be able to explain everything (see the problem of evil in sections 7 and 8 below as an example), the Scriptures do give the most consistent interpretation of the Creation we see around us.

To summarize the positive side

First, we put forwards that the Scriptures and God are our ultimate standard, our ultimate loyalty commitment.

Second, we show that what the Scriptures teach is consistent with what the believer sees, feels and responds to. We must be careful: we are not trying to prove the Scriptures from the Creation; rather, we are trying to show the consistency between the Creation and the biblical picture.

Third, we challenge the unbeliever to accept the truth of the Scriptures and to repent and believe in the offer of the Gospel.

3.3. Calling for a Response

Finally, the negative and positive displays should demand a response. We must make it clear that we are not just offering an alternative; we are demanding that men respond to the claim. Christianity demands a response, men are not neutral; they accept it or suppress it. If they suppress it, they do so with an evil conscience and against their better judgment.

What we can do is put forwards a clear and definite argument for the glory of God—that is our job. The Scriptures testify that the revelation of God is clear, Romans 1:19. And we are to show that this true Christianity is the only reasonable position to take of this world; at the same time, we must recognize our limits. We cannot convert the sinner. We cannot get the sinner to agree. He is fallen in his nature and the natural man is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can he be; however, we can honor God by putting forth the truth and should the Spirit work to enlighten the mind, the words will be effective. We must also pray.

3.4. Summary Outline of Paul's Method ¹⁷

Presupposition exposes that there is no common ground. The believer's and the world's worldviews are distinct.

1. It attacks the presupposition of unbelievers.
2. It puts forth the truth of the Scriptures.

4. God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility in Apologetics

Our final point builds upon (1.3.) above and speaks to the nature and limits of our responsibility. Apologetics is only effective if it is according to God's will. In apologetics, salvation and an acceptance of the truth rest upon God's work. Understanding, conversion and the acceptance of the defense only occur through the sovereign power of God.

At the same time, Scripture also teaches that man is fully responsible for his actions, as Christians and as non-Christians. In Acts 17:30, Paul says to unbelieving Gentiles in Athens:

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,"

God's sovereignty does not deny human responsibility; God's sovereignty engages human responsibility. It is better to say that it is because God is sovereign that we evangelize and do the work of apologetics. If God is not sovereign, then our doctrine of sin and the Fall will stop us from evangelizing, as the natural man will not receive the things of the Spirit of God. Only God can cause a man to hear and obey the Gospel. Because of his fallen nature, we can neither convert the sinner nor get him to agree.

We are called to proclaim. When we have proclaimed and prayed, we have done our job. Unbelievers are called to hear, that is their job, and those whom God elects to eternal life will hear, that is His job. *"Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed"* (Acts 13:48). These truths frame our responsibility.

Conclusion

In defending the faith, Paul does not look for neutral ground between the parties; rather, Paul follows the dual model of exposing the errors of their thinking and putting

¹⁷ This is a summary of Van Til's Apologetic, 496

forth or proclaiming the true biblical doctrine of Christ. He speaks from a position of Christ-centered authority and calls men to repentance and faith.

Paul offers two completely differing worldviews. First, he analyses the Athenian worldview exposing its presuppositions and inconstancies; then, he puts forwards the truth of the Gospel. This twofold approach, a negative critique of their position and a propagation of the truth, is the same method we have been developing within this course.

Summary

In Athens, Paul had the opportunity to defend his faith before the Greeks, who had a highly developed philosophical system. In defending Christianity, Paul does not enter into their worldview or give any authority to it. Instead, Paul challenges their worldview, exposing its inconstancies; then, he clearly puts forwards a true biblical worldview.

Lesson Five Questions

1. Were the Athenians philosophically developed?
2. Was this a formal defense of the faith?
3. In what way was Paul uniquely equipped to represent God to the masses?
4. Does Paul argue specifics of Christ's resurrection or an entire worldview?
5. Name how Paul attacked their worldview?

6. What does Paul appeal to as his ultimate reference point?
7. Does Paul try to find a neutral middle ground between both worldviews?
8. Explain how Paul shows that they are suppressing the truth? Cite a verse.
8. Does Paul call them to repentance?
10. Outline an apologetic method.

Lesson 6. The Problem of Faith and Circular Reasoning

1. Introduction

It is often said that if we use the presupposition argument we are indulging in fideism (believing blindly in something) or that we are involved in circular reasoning. In this section we will evaluate these claims and offer a Christian counter to them.

2. The Problem of Faith

The problem of faith is put this way:

Faith is to believe what you know is not true or faith is to believe what you cannot know; it is blind faith, without a basis or contrary to reason.

We hear this from some preachers: You just have to believe. In some circles we also hear that faith is put in contrast to reason—Either you have faith, or you have reason. How is the Christian to answer these things?

2.1. Men to Some Extent Live by Faith

Man can not fully know everything and has to live his life based upon the information given by others. I have never been to Australia, but I have testimony that it is there and that it exists. I have personal testimony, photographic evidence and literature. Every single one of us bases what we know on some form of faith and testimony. The scientist also puts his trust in his research methods. Because he has been trained to trust only what he can prove with a certain set of evidence, he puts his trust in that method. As we have seen, we all have faith; we just start from different places.

2.2. Christianity Promotes the Use of the Mind and Right Reasoning.

Christianity demands we apply our minds to the issue before us: we are to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and *minds*. We are to *think* God's thoughts after Him and we are to be renewed in the spirit of our *minds*. We are to take the things that have been given to us and to our children, and *study* them. Christianity is a very *thinking* religion. Furthermore, where there is Christianity there has been an intellectual awakening. Christianity promotes the use of reason; it is not averse to it. In the 1900 there was a great revival (Christian awakening) in Wales. Many coal miners were converted and because of this, many now wanted to learn to read in order to read the Bible. Learning to read then led them to read many other books. Christianity increases learning and knowledge, it does not hinder it.

2.3. Faith Is Supported by Reason, Mind and Proof.

There is a maxim: we cannot reason to faith but faith is not without reason.¹⁸

The first clause in this quote makes the point that reason and the mind will not lead us to God. This is according to everything we have studied so far. However, that being said, we also acknowledge that God's word and His Creation flow in the same

¹⁸ This maxim was referred to in lesson 2.

direction. God is consistent in His general and special revelation. Reason, faith and logic are all consistent with God's revealed truth.

3. Presuppositions, Circular reasoning and Fideism.

Another critique is that as Christians we hold to circular reasoning: our authority is based upon the Bible because we believe that the Bible is true.

1. Why do you believe the Bible? Because it is true
2. How do you know it is true? Because it tells me it is true.
3. So you believe that the Bible is true, because you say it is true.

This is what we call circular reasoning, and it is linked to fideism. Fideism states that I believe because I believe. John Frame makes a number of observations concerning fideism and circular reasoning.

3.1. All Reasoning Is Circular.

First Frames points out that to some extent, all reasoning is circular. At the bottom of all our reasoning are value judgments, presuppositions, fundamental claims that we cannot prove. The unbeliever will claim that we are guilty of this, but we can show him that he is just as guilty. The man who says, "I must have a proof before I believe", when asked what is sufficient proof may reply, "I must touch it, hear it, smell it." In so doing, he is saying that his senses are the ultimate standard. "Why is this personal, physical proof your ultimate standard?" is our counter question and the only answer this allows is "Well, that is because it is." In doing this exercise, we are showing the unbeliever that all men have ultimate, non-provable (non-falsifiable) value judgments and we all hold to circular reasoning.

3.2. Narrow Circular and Broadly Circular Reasoning

Frame (9-14) also makes a distinction between narrow circular arguments and broadly circular arguments. Drawing upon the illustration of circular reasoning above, a narrowly circular argument is one that is over with quickly, such as "God's word says it true because it is true." In contrast a broadly circular argument is one that, while it is still circular, allows us to explore a number of issues, beliefs, and truths and to present them to others. We start with the special revelation of God then interpret the natural world with it, in its light, (so it is still circular). As we do this, we see the consistency and meaning that we can gain from doing this.

The more facets or angles we can add to these broadly circular arguments, the more powerful they become as they allow us to display and proclaim more truth. If we are able to demonstrate Creation, that is great, but if we can also look at the scriptural teaching of man, then compare it to what we see around us, that is even more powerful. The more facets, aspects, or angles of scriptural truth we can open up by our broadly circular argument the better.

We must strive to be broadly circular in our witness, as this will lead us to be able to display and present the Gospel in a better light.

3.3. Circular Reasoning Does Not End the Conversation

The second objection to circular reasoning is that it will end the conversation. I will say, "I believe because I believe" and he will say that he does not believe because he does not believe and then we have nothing left to talk about.

The reason for this objection is that the wrong meeting point is being looked for. In classical apologetics a common meeting point is sought, as the fear is that without a common meeting point, there can be no real discussion. In contrast, presuppositional apologetics argues that the only meeting point is that the Spirit of God must work in order to overthrow the unbeliever's false presumptions/ hostility/ unbelief. The point of contact is God's claim and God's power to apply that claim to one's life. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. He will witness to the truth of Jesus/God. In addition, the image of God is not completely eradicated by the Fall. Remaining still are the conscience and the witness of the Creation that is being suppressed, through which we can yet reach the unbeliever.

3.4. A Practical Example of Narrow and Broad Circular Reasoning

Recently a friend of mine was evangelizing Muslims in a mosque. During that time he was asked a very direct question—"Is Jesus the Son of God?" He knew that if he simply answered "Yes, because the Bible says He is", his opportunity to speak would have ended. Instead, my friend said the same thing, but in a broader manner. Knowing that Muslims respect the angel Gabriel because Gabriel was the one who was supposed to have spoken to Mohammad, he suggested that they look at what Gabriel said to Mary. Now Gabriel's announcement does not expressly say that Jesus is the Son of God, but it gave my friend a starting point from which to develop a doctrine of Christ. Once he had dealt with the Gabriel text, he then went on to another more explicit Scripture, slowly developing his doctrine. This approach allowed him to explain far more about Christ than if he had just said, "Yes, because the Bible says so." The same technique can be applied to explore any biblical doctrine when speaking to an atheist or person from any other religion.

Conclusion

While there is an element of circular reasoning in presuppositionism, everyone uses circular reasoning to some extent. Further, if we are broadly circular, instead of narrowly circular, it offers us an opportunity to display the contents of the Gospel.

Summary

All men live by faith, even if they do not believe that they do. This faith rests upon the underlying assumptions that control their thinking. Christianity, while based upon faith, always leads to greater thinking and reasoning. While evidence cannot lead to faith, faith is supported by the evidence. We can use broadly circular reasoning in evangelism.

Lesson Six Questions

1. Describe the problem of faith and circular reasoning.
2. Describe how all men live by faith.
3. Complete the following maxim: we cannot reason to faith but ...
4. Explain both parts of the maxim.
5. What is circular reasoning?
6. How is the Bible circular reasoning?
7. Explain how all reasoning is circular.
8. Distinguish between broadly and narrowly circular reasoning.
9. Explain how we use broadly circular reasoning.
10. Why does circular reasoning not end the conversation for the Christian?

Lesson Seven. The Problem of Evil

1. Introduction

The problem of evil is an important topic in apologetics and in practical and pastoral theology. The “problem” is one of the most frequently cited objections to Christianity and is one of the most frequent pastoral issues ministers deal with. This lesson will first define the problem of evil, and then address it under three heads: the challenge of evil to the unbelievers, non-biblical solutions to evil and biblical solutions to evil.

2. The Problem of Evil Defined

The problem is put in the following manner: Since God is good, why do sin, trouble and evil exist in this world? (We are using the idea of evil in a broad sense.)

Frame puts the problem in philosophical terms:

Premise 1. If God were all-powerful, He would be able to prevent Evil.

Premise 2. If God were all-good, He would desire to prevent Evil

Conclusion: So if God were both all-powerful and all good, there would be no evil.

Premise 3. But there is evil,

Conclusion: There is no all-powerful or all-good God. (Frame 150)

From the practical and pastoral point of view, the sovereignty of God is one of our greatest comforts, but it can also cause pastoral trouble. When pain, trouble and evil enter the lives of God’s children, how are we to counsel them? What answer do we have to the cry of the psalmist as he wrestles with the prosperity of the wicked in Psalm 73, or when David says, “Why art thou downcast O my soul?” in Psalm 42. What of the cries of Mary at Jesus’ tomb? What of Job’s cries to God for grace and vindication in his suffering? The problem of evil is an important pastoral matter.

3. Our Method - Humble Submission to the Word of God

The problem of evil demands a humble, careful and scriptural approach. The word of God must control our thinking. Suffering, evil and sin touch upon the deep things of God; things that have not fully been revealed to us. Moses says, *“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law”* (Deut. 29:29). The things that have been given to us we are to explore for our sakes and for our children’s sakes, but we must respect that some things have not been revealed to us. These things represent the deep things of God—mysteries as to His nature, His attributes and His control over history. When dealing with these, we need to be careful and tread carefully.

From a pastoral perspective, caution and restraint are needed, lest we be like Job’s counselors causing trouble rather than helping a suffering brother. When we discuss evil’s power and terrible effects, we are to be sensitive. Sin and evil are offensive to God and are horrific to men. Wars, plagues and all other things show the terrible nature of our surroundings. Quick, smart answers are not welcome; God calls us to

be godly and gentle. Job's comforters were most effective when they were sitting silently with him.

4. Evil and the Unbeliever- How can He Call Anything Evil?

In many cases it is the unbeliever who will raise the problem of evil as an objection to the believer, but evil is as much a difficulty for the believer as it is for the unbeliever.

When the unbeliever argues that if God is Sovereign He should not allow this or that to happen, he gives the believer an opportunity to challenge the him as to why and upon what basis he finds evil wrong. Why is he so upset? Does he truly have a basis to be upset with Evil? His assertion that something is evil allows his worldview to be challenged by the believer. Since an unbeliever is made in the image of God, he will have an emotional response to Evil, and this response allows the believer to challenge him to establish the moral basis for his feelings. Why does he feel outraged, hurt, upset or angry? Upon what basis can he say something is right and something is wrong? When the believer does this he is challenging the unbeliever to justify his own moral assertions, and as we shall see, when unbelieving man is pushed he will have no ultimate grounds to react to evil. His own philosophy will not give him any ultimate grounds on which to say that something is evil or something is not. The believer can use the unbeliever's assertion to force him to see his own inconsistency.

The following questions will expose the unbeliever's position. What does the unbeliever mean when he says that something is evil? What is his definition of good and evil? Can he, according to his own philosophy, truly say that anything is evil? The questions ask him to justify his own philosophy of evil. We have to ask him to validate his own feelings: If you feel so strongly about it, why? When pushed, the unbeliever will quickly fall into the following defense. This is evil because he or a large group of people thinks that it is evil. His definition of evil will be that he does not like it or more broadly, it is against the common good—what society thinks is evil. It can be quickly pointed out that what is evil for one person is not evil for another and what one society calls evil may not be true in another. A personal or society's preference is not enough. The truth is what an unbeliever says is a moral issue is just one of personal approval or disapproval of something.

At the end of the day the unbeliever is left with only his personal choice or feelings. The unbeliever needs to see that his own position is not satisfactory. He needs a better ground to describe the world around him. The unbeliever's question about evil is one of the things we can use to show him his own internal inconsistency. It is then up to us to humbly and gently offer him an alternative. We emotionally respond to evil because we are in the image of God and God hates sin and evil.¹⁹

5. Non-biblical Solutions to Evil²⁰

There are a number of non-biblical solutions to evil. We will spend some time looking at them in order to recognize them and avoid their mistakes.

¹⁹ For Bahnsen's development of this argument see *Always Ready*, 163-175

²⁰ The list of Non-biblical Solutions is taken from Frame, *Apologetics*, 149-170 and Payne, *Unpublished Lectures*, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson

5.1. Evil Is Not Real; It Is an Illusion

Some Western and Eastern cults argue that evil and trouble are merely an illusion. This is based upon the assertion that matter, material Creation, is not real. The only real thing is the immaterial or spiritual. This is an attack on Creation. It denies that man was made body and spirit (Gen. 1:26, 27; 2:7). It denies that Creation is necessary to man and that God created it "good" (Gen. 1:21). Further, if hurt and pain are an illusion, then so are happiness and joy. Even if pain is an illusion, it is a very troubling one! Their illusion is just as troubling as my reality! What is the real difference between their illusion and my reality? If it is an illusion, for what reason did God give us this illusion of pain? In Scripture evil is seen as real and causing great trouble. It is something that entered the Creation and corrupted it (Rom. 8:20-22).

5.2. Suffering is necessary to help us grow and learn

In Christian circles we commonly hear that God allows evil to build our character and to enable us to grow and help others. We will look at both of these in turn.

5.2.1. God uses evil to build character

We often hear it said that evil builds character; therefore, sin and evil are necessary. Romans 5:1-4 points to this truth:

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

It is a source of great comfort for Christians that God overrules our suffering for good, but we should note that this passage is addressed to *saved* Christians and does not address the foundational question of why evil and suffering originally came into being. We must recognize that sin and suffering and the need for Christians to joyfully persevere occurred only because man fell. Adam was not created to need suffering and there was no need for Adam or for us to suffer if he had been obedient.

We must also recognize that suffering alone does not sanctify and build up. In order for us to benefit from suffering, God's grace is required. Suffering in the unbeliever, without God's grace, will only lead to more sin. This is seen in the book of Revelation.

"Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory. Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds" (Rev. 16:8-11).

Revelation shows that suffering without God's grace leads to more sin, not holiness. In order for suffering to develop holiness, God must bless it. Man needs to

understand the purpose of suffering and submit his heart to biblical teaching before it will be used for good.

5.2.2. Evil and Suffering Help Us to Help Others

The second argument states that when someone suffers they learn about suffering so that they can teach others. Practically the argument runs as follows: I could not understand why God allowed me to lose a son until my friend lost her son and I could comfort her. This gave me a reason for my suffering.

The argument is valid but limited. In many cases God does not tell us the real reason for our sufferings; we are left with our best guesses. We might take comfort for a while that God is allowing me to suffer so that I could help someone else, but this comfort will soon fade. In other cases we might discover that what we thought was the real reason for our pain was not the real reason at all. The fundamental difficulty is that we cannot really understand God's secret plans. In His wisdom, He does not give us specific reasons for what and why He does things. In many cases God's real reasons and providences will make it impossible to guess. In the book of Job, neither Job nor his comforters understands God's real reason. Justifying our sufferings based upon supposed grounds is not enough. God demands that we find our comfort in Him by trusting in His nature and character, not by guessing some reasons.

5.3. The Sovereignty of God, Evil and Human Free Will

In this section we will deal with the tension between God's sovereignty and Evil and human responsibility. There have been many theological attempts to reconcile these, and these attempts have often led to denying one or the other. In order to protect God's sovereignty, man's responsibility is denied or in order to protect God's character, his sovereignty over evil or man is limited. We will begin by looking at denials of God's sovereignty and then we will look at various denials of human responsibility.

5.3.1. The Limitation of God's Sovereignty to Deny His Control of Evil

It has been suggested that God is in control of everything except evil. This can be heard in preaching that stresses the power of the Devil and seeks to separate the devil's power and responsibility from God's own. The idea of "divine weakness" is developed by Harold S Kushner; (*"When Bad Things Happen to Good People"*). This teaches that God would overcome evil if He could: He does not overcome evil because He cannot do so. He is doing His best. The advantage of this argument is that if God is not in control over evil, then He is not responsible. The cost of this argument is that we are saying that in the Creation there are two powerful forces—good and evil, God and the Devil—and if God is not sovereign over evil, there is no guarantee that He can control or defeat it. In short, He might lose. The Bible never says that God is not fully in control of all things. Although the word does give power to the Devil, the Devil is always subject to God's plan and purpose. The Scriptures are clear that God's plan will not fail.

5.3.2. The Limitation of God's Sovereignty over Human Freedom to Act

A second problem of evil is that if God is fully sovereign, man cannot have free will or if man is sovereign, then God cannot be sovereign over man's free choices. The Scriptures reject this idea. The Bible asserts that man is free in his actions as well as asserting that God is sovereign even over man. These points are made clearly and the Scriptures do not seek to reconcile them.

First, the Scriptures do teach free will. The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Section 9 states:

9.1. God has endued the will of man with that natural liberty that is neither forced, nor, by any absolute necessity of nature, determined good or evil.

9.2. Man, in his state of innocence, had freedom, and power to will and to do that which was good and well pleasing to God; but yet, mutably, so that he might fall from it.

9.3. Man, by his fall into a state of sin, has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.

9.4. When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, He frees him from his natural bondage under sin; and, by His grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so, as that by reason of his remaining corruption, he does not perfectly, or only, will that which is good, but does also will that which is evil.

9.5. The will of man is made perfectly and immutably free to do good alone in the state of glory only.

Human choice is a complex thing and it is helpful to explain the biblical definition of freedom. Scripture and the Westminster Confession of Faith state that man has free will, he does not operate mechanically. This freedom brings responsibility. At the same time they also teach that man's freedom is controlled by his nature. To be free does not mean to be random (that one can potentially do anything at any time); rather, freedom is the ability to choose according to our desires. Since man's desires are fallen and corrupt, he will always choose in a sinful and corrupt way. Man chooses according to his nature (*Westminster Confession of Faith* 9:3). It is only when God works upon his soul, changing his nature *from* the bondage and corruption *to* holiness that he will choose good (*Westminster Confession of Faith* 9:4).

Man's freedom to choose means that he is responsible and his actions will be judged. The Scriptures testify to this in a number of places.

2 Corinthians 5:10 *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."*

Genesis 50:20 *"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."*

Acts 2:23 *“Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;”*

Acts 4:27 *“For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.”*

Finally, the Genesis and Acts texts above, while asserting human freedom and responsibility; also show that these things occurred according to God’s plan. In Joseph’s case, God was in control and He used wicked actions against Joseph for good. In Acts, the wicked actions of men, for which God holds them accountable, are still seen to be under God’s absolute control. Jesus is delivered up according to God’s purpose and foreknowledge. The wicked actions of Herod, Pilate and the Gentiles are said to be according to His hand (action) and purpose (plan).

In summary, we see that the scriptural teaching is found in the following propositions:

1. Man is free to act but is evil in his nature.
2. The freedom of man does not negate God’s sovereignty.
3. God is in control over all these circumstances.
4. God does not take any guilt upon Himself for ordaining sinful men’s actions.

We will explore this area in greater detail later in this lesson.

5.4. Indirect Cause Defense

This defense is used in Reformed circles. The argument is that although God is the planner and organizer, man does the direct action; hence, it is man, not God who bears the direct responsibility. This approach distinguishes between the ultimate cause and the proximate cause. God, the ultimate cause, is not responsible; man, the proximate cause, is responsible.

Scripture describes God as acting in both a direct and indirect manner. God acts directly in Creation and in Christ’s miracles. God is said to be acting indirectly in Christ’s crucifixion. God fore-ordained and planned the event, but sinful man’s actions are the real cause (Acts 2: 22-24; 4:27, 28).

Since we are told that God does act both directly and indirect, can we distinguish between these actions in order to allow us to say that God is responsible when he acts directly but not responsible when he acts indirectly? The idea that because God is working through someone he is not guilty is hard to justify. In English law anyone who aids, abets, counsels and procures an offense is as guilty as the principle offender. The one who pays the assassin is as guilty as the assassin. Employing this logic here means that God would be guilty.

The indirect cause defense rests upon the subtle and complex relationship between God’s planning and fore-ordination and the free act of the individual. In these situations God is the planner and architect. Second, the Scriptures maintain that God is the cause, but never impute evil to him (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23; 4:27). Romans 9

claims God has full and absolute control over men and their actions. These facts show the indirect cause defense is inadequate.

5.5. Ex Lex Defense

Frame states that Gordon Clark, a Reformed Theologian argued that God is outside of the law that He gave to men and so he should not be bound by it.

“He tells us not to kill, and yet He retains for Himself the right to take human life. Thus He is not Himself bound to obey the Ten Commandments or any particular law given to man in the Scripture. Morally He is on an entirely different level from us. Therefore He has the right to do many things that are evil to us, things that contradict the scriptural norms. For a man to cause evil indirectly would be wrong, but it would not be wrong for God. Thus Clark neatly finesses any discussion about God’s justice and goodness” (Frame 167).

There is some merit in these arguments. In a number of places the Scriptures forbid criticism of God’s actions since God’s claim are far superior to man’s (Job 39-40). God reserves the right to do certain actions to Himself. He can do this even though He bars men from the same actions. In Genesis 6:3 God determines the length of man’s life, shortening them to 120 years. “And the LORD said, *‘My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.’*” Later God shortened mans lifespan again to 70 years.

Many Reformed Theologians disagree, arguing that Ten Commandments are an exposition of God’s true nature. They suggest that it is our duty to obey His commandments because they reflect His nature. This is proven from the following texts:

“For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Ex. 20:11).

“For I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 11:44, 45).

“that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45).

“but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:15, 16).

Paul argues that Christ, the God-man is a paradigm for us. Paul states: *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others”* (Phil. 2:3, 4).

Frame suggests that “God does honor, in general, the same law He gives to us. He rules out murder because He hates to see one human being murder another, and He intends to reserve for Himself the right to control human death. He prohibits adultery because He hates adultery (which is a mirror of idolatry-see Hosea). We can be sure

that God will behave according to the same standards He prescribes for us, except insofar as Scriptures declares a difference.”

6. Biblical Solutions to the Problem of Evil

We will now turn to a biblical understanding of the problem of evil. We will look at evil and how it relates to God’s sovereignty, justice and goodness. The biblical answer is complex and offers a number of perspectives. We will be careful to stick as closely to the Scriptures as possible; only going as far as the Scriptures will allow us to go. We are to remember God’s words to Israel that some things have been revealed to us, and some things have not, and those belong to God alone (Deut. 29:29).

6.1. God is fully in control of both evil and good

The Scripture make it clear that God is fully in control of all good and evil actions that occur. Text such as Genesis 50:20 and Acts 2:23, 4:27 show all actions occur according to His purpose. There is no act, good or evil, that is outside the will of God. If we lose a child or a wife dies, even in these extreme cases we can say that these events are subject to God’s will.

6.2. Bahnsen’s Analysis of the Problem of Evil

Bahnsen solution to the problem of God’s sovereignty and evil is to presume, in agreement with the Scriptures, that God is good. Using this logic he then states that God must have a morally good reason for evil. He goes on to say that God has already demonstrated some of this “good” in the history of redemption, particularly the cross. He suggests that if we presuppose God is good, we must presuppose a good motive, even if we cannot understand it. Bahnsen’s argument can be summarized as: since God’s character is good, we must rest in that (Bahnsen, *Always Ready* 171-173). The logic is as follows: When we lose a child and wonder what God is doing, when we look at the cross, we see that God is so good to us that He gave His only Son for our salvation. If God is prepared to make that sacrifice, then everything He does must be guided by love.

6.3. Frames Analysis of the Problem of Evil

Frame in his book *Apologetics to the Glory of God* offers the following approach.

Adam fell in the Garden. When God questions him, he tried to place the blame on God. “The woman you gave me”. In response, God does not seek to defend Himself, rather God places the blame squarely upon Adam. He points out his sin; He judges him and then offers him the hope of salvation. The Fall raises a number of theological questions. Frame asks; “If God was good, where did the serpent come from? If he was originally good with the rest of Creation, when did he become evil, why did he enter into the garden to tempt Eve? If He foreordained the response of Adam and Eve, by what right does He punish them? All these questions arise in the context, but the passage does not answer them.”²¹ Frame points out that God lays the blame squarely upon Adam. Frame also notes that God does not address many questions we might have raised. His deliberate failure to address these questions indicates that God is claiming his Sovereign right to be trusted and believed.

Something similar occurs in Genesis 22. Abraham is asked to offer his own son as a sacrifice. The rightness of Abraham having to sacrifice his own son, murder and the moral commands of God is not raised. Instead God stops Abraham from killing his son and He commends him for his faith and obedience (Gen. 22:15-18, Rom. 4:17-25, Heb. 11:8-19). Frame suggests that this is a pattern in the Scriptures.

6.4. The Limitation of our knowledge of suffering—The Book of Job

The fact that God does not justify His actions to men and that we do not know all the facts about every situation is powerfully made in Job. Job teaches that God's ways are inscrutable and Job contains a powerful warning about judging God (see Frame 162, 172, 173, 176).

The opening chapter of Job sets the scene for the whole book. The action occurs in heaven and gives the true explanation for Job's sufferings. Job is not present in heaven, so he does not know what has occurred. God does not explain it to Job and Job has no idea. Even at the end of the book, Job is not told the reason. Job is never told the true basis for his sufferings, even after he has asked God.

The early chapters show Satan causes Job's suffering. Here we see that Satan must ask God for permission; he cannot act upon his own. The moral dilemma occurs when God grants him that permission. How can a good God allow Job to suffer for God's own purpose, not Job's good? During the sustained discourse in Job 3-37, Job's counselors offer a solution of simple cause and effect: God blesses the good and punishes the wicked; if Job was righteous, he would not suffer like this; if Job was innocent, he would not be suffering. In response to this, Job states that he has been righteous and he desires to come into God's presence to plead his righteousness. Job is clearly correct as God Himself testifies of Job's righteousness in a number of verses.

Job 1:1 *"There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil."*

Job 1:8 *"Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?'"*

Job's questions are instructive. While it is valid to ask God questions, as the psalmist does, God rebukes Job when Job demands that God give him an account of His actions. The distinction between the psalmist and Job indicate that there is a line between humble asking and self-righteous demanding. Job moves from humble questioning to accusation and Job's questions indicate he crosses that line. Questions are fine, accusation against God's justice bring judgment.

At the end of the book, God does speak to Job, but He does not answer him in the way that Job demands (Job 38-42). God begins by speaking to the counselors, stating that they are in error. This is not simple cause and effect; Job was righteous. He vindicates Job by rebuking them, then righteous Job is told to make an offering for them.

As to Job, we have already noted that God does not tell Job about the sequence of events that led to his suffering. God rebukes Job for claiming that He, God, was

unjust. It is vital to note what God does and does not tell Job. When God comes to Job, Job is no longer asking the questions; rather, it is God who asks the questions. God questions Job, forcing Job to realize how little he actually knows (38:4-5). God having established His preeminence once, then does it again. In 40:6-41:34, He questions Job a second time.

Job's response is telling (42:3-6). Job had begun by bringing charges against God. In response God points out Job's inadequacy and sin. Job is forced to admit that in his relationship with God, God is the master and he is the servant. Job is not God's equal and so he has no right to question God. Job repents.

It is important to note that God does not explain Himself to Job. He never explains to Job the real reason behind his suffering. Instead, He justifies His actions by references to His power, might and omnipotence. Once God has established this, the implication is clear: Job does not have the authority to demand a response. By refusing to explain the true nature of the trial, God asserts His own Sovereignty and Glory. As the master, He has the right to do whatever He likes. The Master does not have to justify His actions to His servant. God's words to Job demand that on the question of Job's sufferings, Job has to trust Him. God shows Job how great He is but He never answers Job's real question. By doing so, God keeps His status as God and He demands Job follow Him by faith.

Job teaches us a number of things. First, we are not God. Second, we need to be careful in posing questions of Him. Third, in our sufferings we will not know everything and we might never be told the real reason. Fourth, God calls Job to trust His character. We are called to trust in His character, not understand Him. Finally, we must also note that the Scriptures do say that the latter end of Job was better than the former end. Job 42:12 -15 states: *"Now the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand female donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first Jemimah, the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-happuch. In all the land were found no women so beautiful as the daughters of Job; and their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers."*

6.5. God's Challenge to the Sinner

In *Apologetics* Frame draws our attention to the fact that when men challenge God as to His righteousness, God will often respond by pointing to the injustice of the questioner. When men challenged God as to the rightness of His actions, He turned that challenge back on them. This parallels God's action in Job. God acting in this manner can be found in a number of places in the Scriptures (Frame 174).

Ezekiel 18:25 *"Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair?"*

The point is powerfully made in Matthew 20:1-15: *"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I*

will give you.’ So they went. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.’ So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.’ And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.’ But he answered one of them and said, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?’ So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.”

Frame (175) makes the following observations. First, when the workers question the vineyard owner, as to his justice, the landowner states that the real issue is their injustice. He reminds them that they had agreed to work for this amount and now they are unjustly complaining. Second, God underscores His sovereignty in these matters stating that “don’t I have the right to do...” Third, the reason for the uneven distribution is not given. Fourth, Frame shows that God stresses the reliability and justice of the landowner. (“did you not agree...”). The master offered a denarius, and this is what he gave. At the end of the parable, we see that in fact, far from the landowner being unjust, a proper understanding of the facts vindicate the landowner. The tenants are not assessing the situation properly. As the master sees it (and His view of course is right!), the disparity in pay shows, not unfairness to those who worked all day, but generosity to those who worked only an hour.

6.6. The Justice of God in Romans 9:14-23

We conclude our discussion of evil by looking at Romans 9. This is an important passage dealing with God’s sovereignty, goodness, justice and the problem of evil.

Paul writes this section in a question and answer format—an imaginary protagonist asks the questions and Paul responds. In this series of questions the specific question here is, If God is totally free, in deciding who He will chose and who He will reject, can He still be righteous if He elects some for death? Further, if God is sovereign, can men still be held accountable for the actions they take?

The section is divided into a number of parts, and we will look at each one in turn.

Part 1: The First Question

Romans 9:14 *“What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!”*

In this section Paul raises a question of God's own righteousness. If God, by nothing except His own free choice, determines who will be saved and who will be rejected, can we say that God is acting righteously if He elects some to evil purposes? Paul's answer is clear: Even though God chooses, He is not unrighteousness. In verses 10-13, Paul laid down a general principle, a pattern that is repeated throughout the Scriptures. Pharaoh is a specific illustration. In making his points Paul is careful only to quote God's own words about Himself, thus strengthening his case.

Answer A

15 *For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."*

16 *So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.*

Paul answers the question with a positive and negative statement of God's sovereignty and absolute control over all men's lives. Positively, he points out that the basis of God's compassion is found in His own free choice, nothing more nor less. The reason for the choice is found in God. Negatively, Paul stresses that the true reason that any are blessed is not based upon the individual, "it is not of him who wills" (inner desire) "nor of him who runs" (outward acting of that desire). The verses make it clear that the true reason for any blessing is to be found in the free choice of God alone. These verses also imply God's sovereignty in these matters.

Answer B

He now expands upon the divine freedom and sovereignty of God.

17 *For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth."*

18 *Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.*

In Romans 9:17 Paul stresses that God raised up Pharaoh for a purpose. While we often run to the issue of God's own hardening of Pharaoh, Paul's principle stress is on God's will and purpose, not the hardening. God raises Pharaoh "For this purpose". Paul also shows God's motive: God chooses in order that His power be seen and His name glorified. Everything that happened to Pharaoh was used to demonstrate God's great works to the world. Pharaoh's resistance and hardening only make God's actions more spectacular.

Having stressed God's purpose in verse 17, Paul then goes on to stress His freedom in all things in Romans 9:18. This verse creates a parallel. It is God who has mercy; it is God who hardens. God is in absolute control of all events. The concept of hardening refers to making a sinner spiritually insensitive. It is used 14 times in Exodus (Moo 596). Although in Exodus God's explicit reference to hardening was only after we are told that Pharaoh had hardened his own heart, this is not Paul's thrust here. Further, it is unclear that that conclusion can even be drawn from Exodus itself. Romans 9:18 tells us that God is not constrained by any act or consideration other than His own will. The hardening indicated here is a sovereign act of God.

In dealing with the justice of God, it is important to note that Paul does not back down from claiming the absolute sovereignty of God in all things. He has already said that every blessing is based upon God's sovereign will and now he stresses that it is God who hardened Pharaoh's heart. Paul affirms that God's sovereignty is absolute; there is no action that He does not control.

Part 2: The Second Question.

Romans 9:19 *"You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?'"*

In Romans 9:17, 18 Paul demonstrated the absolute sovereignty of God over every aspect, good and evil. He showed that God controls all events for His own purpose. These truths raise the next question, If this is true, how can God still find fault when men do what they have been chosen to do? Evil men are only acting according to God's will.

Romans 9:20 *"But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, 'Why have you made me like this?'"*

In this important verse we start by looking at what Paul does not do. Paul does not resort to any of the specific defenses, like the "greater good" or the "indirect cause" defense. Further Paul does not try to reconcile (here or anywhere else in the Scriptures) the tension of divine hardening and human responsibility. Throughout his letters, Paul teaches both; yet, he never tries to reconcile them.

Paul's reply, that they have no right to argue in this way with God, is a direct challenge to men. Paul begins with the phrase "O man" drawing a contrast between created man and God, the creature and the Creator. Having established the subordinate—the lesser status of man in his argument—he then builds upon it arguing that man has no right to challenge God as to His actions. God has the absolute right to do as He wishes.

9:21 *"Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?"*

The use of the potter and the clay illustration was common in Israel and in the Middle East. The illustration stresses the right of the potter to make whatever he likes out of the clay. Jeremiah and Isaiah both use this metaphor (Jer. 18:1-9, Isa. 29:16, 45:9).

Isaiah 29:16 *"Surely you have things turned around! Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay; For shall the thing made say of him who made it, 'He did not make me?' Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it, 'He has no understanding?'"*

Isaiah 45:9 *"Woe to him who strives with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' Or shall your handiwork say, 'He has no hands?'"*

Paul uses the same logic to show that as the potter has the right to make the clay into anything he wishes, even so God has the right to do anything He wishes, even with men. Paul then continues his argument.

Romans 9:22 *“What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory,”*

Verse 22 begins a conditional sentence, one that Paul does not complete. In this verse Paul points to God’s power and the demonstration of His wrath. He says that both of these are to show His glory to those upon whom He will have mercy (His church) His glory.

Moo (605) paraphrases verse 22 in the following manner: “God allowed the wickedness of sin to grow and manifest itself in order that when He eventually comes in glory, He receives the greater glory. In His patience, God did not bring judgment immediately after the Fall on the wicked; rather, He waits so as to allow His glory to be more greatly manifested to His church. This glory will be seen by the vessels of mercy, the church, who God prepared beforehand for glory.”

In conclusion, Romans 9:18-22 make the following points: First, God is sovereign. Second, God acts according to His own will. Third, man has no right to question God; God is the potter and men are like clay. Finally, the wickedness of men will be used to demonstrate God’s glory. Bruce commenting on this section simply states: “God is not answerable to us for what He does” (184).

Conclusion

There are a number of non-biblical defenses to the issue of evil before God: most of these either limit God’s goodness, His wisdom or His power. The explanations fail to give due weight to the biblical and exegetical evidence. In order to be faithful before God, we must be strictly exegetical and recognize our limitations when delving into the mysteries of God.

Summary

Job tells us to be careful when dealing with the issues of evil. Because we do not have all the facts, we might make wrong judgments. We must also be careful how we approach God when we are dealing with the problem of suffering. We must always approach Him with humility and care. In Romans 9 Paul teaches that God is absolutely sovereign over all things, even the eternal destiny of both the wicked and the righteous. He can do this as the potter has power over the clay to make it into whatever he chooses. He does this all to His own glory.

Lesson Seven Questions

1. Describe the problem of evil.
2. Discuss the *suffering builds character* defense. What is wrong with it?
3. God is not sovereign over ALL evil. True or False?
4. What is the *indirect cause defense*?
5. What is the *Ex Lex defense*?
6. When God is challenged as to the righteousness of His actions, what is His response towards men?
7. List some lessons from the book of Job.
8. Explain John Frames *greater good defense*.
9. In Romans 9, what point does Paul make in respect of the sovereignty of God and the eternal destiny of men.
10. In Romans 9, what are God's purposes for which He works all things?

Lesson Eight. History, Theology, Suffering and Apologetics

1. Introduction

In this final section we will continue to look at the problem of evil in the light of God's revelation over time. The revelation of God to man, the basis of our theology, occurs in history. To understand God's purposes we need a historical perspective. We must remember that God does not reveal everything at once. This means that we must be careful in evaluating His actions before He has completed His works. This lesson will look at the role history plays in theology and apologetics. In many cases, God's initial actions seem incomprehensible, but later when His full plan is revealed, we see the justice of it. Our discussion will focus on three areas. First, we will look at the role of history in theology and apologetics. Second, we will look at how the Scriptures teach us to respond to evil. This includes Frames modified greater good defense. Finally we will look at how the church in heaven, after she has completed here warfare, understands her own suffering.

2. The Progressive Nature of Theology

2.1. The Progressive Revelation of God

The Bible teaches that time is linear. In Genesis 1:1 we are told, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*" It also has an end—when God in Christ will bring all things to completion and bring in the New Heavens and the New Earth. God's revelation occurs over time and in history, in and through time and space. This means God's revelation is never abstract, arbitrary or merely propositional. It is also never complete in our lives or in this world. All of this means that God's revelation of Himself and our knowledge and our understanding of Him will change over time. This idea of God revealing Himself over time has implications for theology and apologetics. Frame states: "I have always thought that a great many of the mysteries of theology boil down to the mystery of time" (180). The following analysis is based upon Frame's work in *Apologetics* (179-189) and will loosely follow his structure.

2.2. The Tension of Historical Theology

The historical nature of theology creates tension. We see this in God's dealing with Adam. God was clear. The penalty for Adam's sin was death. In Genesis 2:17,18 God says: "*but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*" And yet God did not kill Adam, He had mercy upon him. At that time God's action seem unjust. How could a just God not do what he promised? God's mercy created a tension. If justice was strict and immediate, God should have offered no mercy. How can a holy God who believes in strict justice withhold Adam's punishment? This problem remains until the coming of the seed promised in Genesis 3:16.

God's goodness to Israel presents a similar problem. Israel was not chosen to be God's firstborn because she was good, rather Israel was chosen because of God's free unmerited grace. This raises the same question we saw with Adam. How can God be merciful to sinful Israel and still be just? God blessed Israel even though she was sinful. If He had applied strict and immediate justice to her, He should have judged and rejected her on many occasions in her history.

Paul indicates how important this problem is. He refers to it in one of the greatest Gospel passages, Romans 3. In this passage Paul argues that a key element of Christ's crucifixion is how His death deals with the problem of unforgiven sin in the Old Testament. In Romans 3 Paul explains that the cross shows how God could be merciful to Old Testament sinners whose sins had not been dealt with. In Romans 3:25, 26 he states:

“whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Paul states that in order to fulfill God's justice for sin committed in the Old Testament, God set forth His Son as a propitiation for sin. He had to do this as He had passed over sin in the Old Testament, sin that He should have judged. This meant that for a period, the period from when God had been merciful until the period when He dealt with sin, God seemed to be unjust. Now that Christ has come and dealt with sin, God is now publically seen to be just. God's revelation over time in history created an apparent tension; one that was only resolved in the cross. The public demonstration of the cross removes the tension.

Frame states: “The whole Old Testament period may be described as a period of waiting. It is evident that Israel's home in Canaan does not in itself fulfill the promise made to Abraham. The bulls and goats of sacrifice do not take away the sin of the people. Of all the deliverers, none of them crush the head of the serpent. Indeed, Israel's disobedience, punctuated, to be sure, by periods of revival, become worse and worse. In perspective the long wait of the Old Testament period accentuates the problem of evil, not just because of the length, but because it produces a kind of dialectic between justice and mercy. The prophets proclaim justice: Israel will be judged for her disobedience. But they also proclaim grace: God is coming to redeem His people. Judgment is coming but the promises to Adam and Abraham will nevertheless be fulfilled. How can this be? Israel's sins are worse than the pagan nations of Canaan, even of Sodom and Gomorrah which God destroyed. How can a just God do anything but wipe them out entirely?”

2.3. How Are We to Apply this Principle Today?

Our understanding that God does not do everything at once and that in His time He will resolve things that seem unjust are important when addressing the subject of evil in our lives today. There may be great evil and trouble and we may struggle with how God can allow such things to happen. If Jesus Christ is already ruling and reigning, how can He be just and loving with all the troubles in our lives? In these situations we are to remember that God has not finished His work and the full extent of His plan has not yet been put into effect. At present we are in a state of tension. We are to remember that just as God resolved the tension in the works of God in Christ, it is probable that He will resolve our tension at a later date. This introduces the next section, the witnesses of the church who have already finished their race and are in heaven.

3. The Witness of the Church to God's Faithfulness

Apologetics raises many difficult issues—things hard to understand. Some problems and issues *seem to be* so insurmountable, that not even God seems to be able to deal with them. When issues are beyond our grasp, we do not have to despair. To help us, God has given us the book of Revelation as a witness to the attitude of the church after she has finished her race.

The book of Revelation tells us of things that will shortly come to pass. The book is unique as it allows us to fast-forward into the future to see what the church thinks after she had suffered in this world, completed the race and is with God. It enables us to hear the church's testimony after she has seen all of God's plans brought to completion. There are two primary passages, Revelation 15:3-4 and Revelation 16:5-7.

Revelation 15:3-4 states: "*They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: 'Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested.'*"

Revelation 16:5-7 "*And I heard the angel of the waters saying: 'You are righteous, O Lord, The One who is and who was and who is to be, Because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, And You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due.'* And I heard another from the altar saying, '*Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.'*"

In both of these passages, we see the church at rest. She has finished her warfare and her suffering is at an end. Her testimony is that God has been just and holy in His ways. He has been faithful and she is blessed.

The passages give no indication that the church has any doubts over God's judgment or His justice. The praise of the saints who comprise the church implies that there are no unresolved issues. We are not told what information they have. They might have it all or like Job, they may only see part of the picture; even so, whatever they know, they are clearly satisfied. They are enjoying God in a fuller manner and they love and worship Him. This is their testimony and it will be our testimony when we have finished the race. Not only will we have a greater revelation of God's nature, but our sinfulness will be removed and our hearts will be changed. Unbelief, distrust, skepticism—results of the Fall—will be taken away. These things currently control our lives making it impossible for us to be neutral. When God grants us a new heart and mind, we will be able to see more clearly. It is the clear testimony of the saints in heaven that they are happy. They are content with God and His ways.

4. Frame's Modified Greater Good Defense

This section focuses upon Frame's personal defense or apology for the problem of evil. Frame (184-186) proposes that the best thesis is a modified form of the greater good defense. This states that God is using evil for His own good purposes. He is

seeking first His own glory, but His plans also lead to things working out for the saints' own good (Apologetics 184).

Frame begins with the greater good defense but he qualifies it in a number of important ways.

First, the greater good defense is not man's greater defense; it is God's greater good that is most important. God's ultimate purpose is not to bring human happiness; God's chief end is to glorify Himself. Support for this can be found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, question one, which states that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. The greater good is God's glory, not man's greatest good. To put it another way, man must first seek the kingdom of God and then all these things will be given unto him.

While both God and man will look to God's glory first, Frame recognizes that an essential part of God's glory is the way that He looks after His people. They cannot be separated. God orders events so that His own glory will also lead to man being blessed (John 3:16, John 10:10).

This concept can be illustrated from the book of Job. Satan's challenge and God's acceptance of Satan's challenge related principally to God's own honor and glory. Job's trials, comfort and happiness are secondary. The great focus is God's glory, worship and honor. Job learned through his suffering and trials, and afterwards God blessed Job more than at the beginning of the encounter. Job illustrates that God places His glory first, but an essential element of His glory is that He cares for His people. "All things work together for good to those who love God and are called", but in a way that is always subservient to God's glory.

Frame qualifies this defense in another way. He states that we are to understand that God does not treat all men equally. In His actions, God distinguishes between His own children and the rest of Creation. There is no universalism; it is not that all human beings will be saved; rather, God makes a distinction between those He calls His own and those He rejects. To His own— those who love Christ and are called, all things are working together for good. In contrast, God's providence to those He rejects means that some will endure greater punishment for their sins. Frame states: "for this group history is not working towards their greater good, but a greater curse" (186).

5. Scriptural Uses for Evil

The final section looks at how God uses evil for good. Even though the cross means that God could bring evil to an end immediately, God has chosen not to do so. Instead He currently uses evil to the benefit of His church. How He does this is a mystery. Frame (186-187) points to a number of ways that the Scriptures say that God uses evil for good in the life of the church. I have listed them below.

1. Evil is used to display His grace and justice: Romans 3:26 (above); Romans 5:8, 20, 21; 9:17. In Romans 5:8 Paul states: "*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*"

In Romans 5:20, God uses evil to demonstrate His grace.

Romans 5:20 "Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

2. God uses evil to show His righteous judgments: Matthew 23:35, John 5:14.

"Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, ³⁵that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar "(Matt. 23:34, 35).

3. We must remember at all times that there is not a one-to-one correlation between sin and God's justice and we must be careful in making those claims (see Job supra and Luke 13:1-5).

4. Suffering is also used as a shock value to unbelievers, intended to gain their attention and to promote a change of heart: (Zech. 13:7-9, Luke 13:1-5, John 9).

"There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish' "(Luke 13:1-5).

5. Evil and suffering can also have a redemptive element. The key illustration of this is Jesus' own sufferings. It is through His own sufferings that we are redeemed. Paul also claims that his own sufferings are redemptive, not in that they atone for sin, but he does see continuity between Christ's sufferings and his own. Paul has suffered in planting churches and he has suffered in his mission activity even as Jesus did. Paul states: *"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church"* (Col. 1:24).

6. Suffering is used as Fatherly chastening to believers. Hebrews 12:3-11 states:

"And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives.' It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

7. Suffering is also used by God to vindicate His own justice and glory (Rom. 3:26 above).

The list above shows the varying ways that God uses evil. This list is not exhaustive.

Conclusion

In trying to understand God's ways we must remember that God reveals Himself progressively. To fully understand Him we must wait until He has fully disclosed all His purposes to us. We are always to remember that in the great examples given to us of the saints in heaven, none of them have any complaints against God; rather, they all prefer to praise and worship Him.

Summary

We are always to remember that God reveals Himself progressively through history, not all at once. This progressive revelation can lead to tension. An example of this tension is God's goodness to wicked Israel in the Old Testament. How could a holy God be good to wicked, sinful Israel? The answer to this comes with the death of Jesus as a propitiation for Israel's sins. The same problem occurs with sin in the world now. When will it be put right? The Scripture encourages us to wait for the final Day of Judgment when God will reveal far more of His plan. The testimony of the saints in the book of Revelation shows this to be so. Frame argues that the best defense seems to be a modified form of the greater good defense. God is working all things out for the best for His own glory, and part of this is the fact that God is good to man. We have also seen that the Scriptures give a number of uses for evil and we need wisdom to understand which one we are to apply.

Lesson Eight Questions

1. How does God reveal Himself to men?
2. Why is it difficult to see why God could be good to Israel?
3. Explain the significance of Romans 3:25, 26.
4. How do we apply the lesson of Israel and the cross to the suffering church now?
5. Which text in Revelation shows us the believer's response to the end of the story?
6. What do the texts in Revelation indicate about how the saints will view God's dealings with them in the future?
7. What is John Frame's "Greater Good Defense"?
8. Name a few ways that God uses evil in this world.
9. In what way does Paul equate his suffering with that of Jesus' suffering?
10. Explain the biblical concept of Fatherly discipline.

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 Wolterstorff, Nicholas: *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1999 (originally printed 1976).

Online Apologetic Websites

- <http://www.apologeticsresctr.org>
<http://www.cmfnow.com> - Bahnsen Material
<http://www.monogism.org> - Bahnsen Material
[Http://www.mints.edu](http://www.mints.edu). (Neal Hegeman has material on apologetics).
<http://www.thirdmill.org>
<http://www.vantil.info/> - a site dedicated to Van Til.
<http://www.apologetics.com/default.jsp>
<http://www.capo.org/>
<http://www.carm.org/>
<http://www.reformed.org/> Presuppositionalism.
<http://www.reasons.org/index.shtml>
 Mints.edu.

Appendix 1. Classical Apologetics further defined.

Although we can say that there are two main types of apologetics—Reformed and Classical—there is a historical division of classical into two subgroups: classic and evidentialist. Below are two short definitions (with illustrations) of both. They are taken from the Carm website, <http://www.carm.org>

Classical Apologetics:

<http://www.carm.org/apologetics/classical.htm>

Classical Apologetics is that style of Christian defense that stresses rational arguments for the existence of God and uses evidence to substantiate biblical claims and miracles. It is quite similar to evidential apologetics and appeals to human reason and evidence. Early Classical Apologists include Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas. Contemporary classical apologists are Norman Geisler, William Craig, J. P. Moreland, and R.C. Sproul.

Some of the arguments relied upon for proofs of God's existence are the cosmological argument and the teleological argument. The cosmological argument attempts to prove that God exists by stating that there has to be an uncaused cause of all things. That uncaused cause is God. The teleological argument uses the analogy of design; that is, the universe and life exhibit marks of design. Therefore, there must be a Designer. Other times, strict evidence is used to establish Christianity's validity. Of course, both aspects are also combined in classical apologetics.

An example of the latter might be as follows:

Allen: Can you give me a logical reason why God exists?

Matt: I will try (simple logic). The universe exists. The universe cannot be eternal because if it were eternal then it would mean that an infinite amount of time has passed in order for us to get to the present. But you cannot transverse an infinite amount of time. Therefore the universe is not infinitely old.

Allen: That is an interesting argument. Do you have anything else?

Matt: Sure (Cosmological Argument). All things that came into existence are caused to exist. There cannot be an infinite regression of causes because this would mean that there was an infinite amount of time in the past that had to be traversed in order for us to get to the present. Again, you are not able to cross an infinite amount of time. Therefore, it is logical to say that there must be a single uncaused cause. I propose that that uncaused cause is God.

The preceding, very simplistic dialogue has strengths and weaknesses but it demonstrates a way of using evidence and logic as a defense to support the resurrection, a biblical miracle.

A variation on this could focus on prophecies and be as follows:

1. The Bible claims to be the word of God.
2. The Bible has been accurately transmitted to us through the copying method.
3. The Old Testament was written before the New Testament.
4. The Old Testament contains prophecies of Jesus fulfilled in the New Testament.
5. Jesus fulfilled the prophecies.
6. This shows that the Bible is inspired.
7. Since it is inspired, it is accurate.
8. It says that God exists.
9. Therefore, God exists.

No argument is without strengths and weaknesses, and all Classical Apologetic approaches have been tackled by critics. But the critics are not left unanswered and Christians have, in turn, refuted the refutations. This back-and-forth process of

point-counter-point is going to continue until Jesus returns. Nevertheless, God commands that we do our best to defend the faith and classical apologetics is one of the means to do that.

Much of the information here on CARM can be used in a classical defense. There is documentation for biblical manuscript evidence in the Bible section. There is also a list of prophecies about Jesus in the Bible section, and more. I recommend you go to the Apologetics Dialogues section and read a few of them to see how different subjects can be used. If you want logical approaches, try some proofs for God in the Atheist section. Finally, if you really want to test yourself, get on the internet, find a chat room through AOL Instant Messenger or Yahoo Instant Messenger, and go in and debate with people in religious discussion rooms. You will quickly learn what you need to know.

Whichever you do, think of apologetics as a mosaic of skills and knowledge that God uses in the believer to bring truth to the world. At first it is not easy to do, but it gets easier and easier the more you do it.

An Illustration of evidentialist apologetics

<http://www.carm.org/apologetics/evidential.htm>

Evidential Apologetics is that style of Christian defense that stresses the miracles found in the Bible, particularly Christ's resurrection, as evidence for the existence of God and the validity of Christ and His words. It also uses historical evidences to support the veracity of the biblical account(s). In this, it is very similar to Classical Apologetics which stresses reason in its approach to evidences. Basically, evidential apologetics stresses evidence such as miracles, fulfilled prophecies, etc., and uses reason to support them.

An example of evidential apologetics might be as follows (Note the similar argument to the classical approach):

Allen: How do I know God exists?

Paul: One of the ways can be found in the Gospel accounts where Jesus performed many miracles like walking on water, healing the sick, etc., and then finally rising from the dead. No mere man can do these kinds of things. There had to be something supernatural at work. Why can't that be God?

Allen: But the Bible is full of myths. It is just a bunch of stories.

Paul: Actually, they are not just myths and stories. The Gospels, for example, were written by those who either knew Jesus personally, or were under the direction of those who did. The Gospels are full of factual accounts of cities, customs, terms, locations, etc., that can all be verified historically and archaeologically. There are many books that have verified the authenticity of the Gospel accounts.

Allen: If that is true, then I am sure the Gospels have been corrupted over time.

Paul: Actually, that isn't quite accurate. You see, the New Testament alone has something like 24,000 supporting biblical manuscripts and they are around 99.5% textually pure. That means that they have been reliably transmitted to us through the centuries. We can trust them.

Allen: Still, I can't believe all those miracles and stuff.

Paul: Why not? Many eyewitnesses wrote and spoke about what they saw Jesus do. After the Gospel accounts were written, there were plenty of people who saw

Jesus and could have spoken up or written something down contradicting what the apostles wrote. But we have no account of this happening.

Allen: I didn't think of that.

Paul: Furthermore, the eyewitnesses wrote about what they saw, and they saw miracles, as did hundreds of others. Jesus healed people, walked on water, calmed a storm by a command, and rose from the dead; therefore, whatever He says must be true since He backed up His words with His deeds.

Allen: That makes sense, but that doesn't mean there is a God.

Paul: True, it doesn't require that a God exist, but since Jesus spoke about God, and about the need to be right with God, etc., and since He performed many miracles, including rising from the dead, then it is safe to say that not only is there a God, but that we should listen to Jesus. This would also mean that the Bible is the inspired word of God.

Allen: I'll have to think about what you said.

Generally, the evidential apologetics stresses data that supports the miraculous evidences of the biblical accounts, thereby authenticating the Bible and the claims and deeds of Jesus.

Adherents to this position have been B. B. Warfield, John Warwick Montgomery, Clark Pinnock, etc.

Appendix 2. Ligonier and RC Sproul

A Critique Of RC Sproul's Apologetic Method

"RC" is a noted Reformed Theologian with Ligonier Ministries. During his ministry he has written a number of Apologetic books, the most recent being *Defending Your Faith, An introduction to Apologetics*. RC states: "The best way to go about constructing a case for the Christian faith is partly the concern of this book." In the light of the false claim between being reasonable and having faith, Sproul's desires to show that Christianity is neither illogical nor irrational (17). His objective is to prove the existence of God as "if we can establish the existence of God first if the authority of the Bible is established.... then all the other issues of theology become easier to defend (18).

Sproul develops his rationale argument as follows. First, he asserts a basic rationality in the world through (1) the law of non-contradiction, (2) the law of causality, (3) the basic reliability of sense perception and (4) the analogical use of language. He argues that these are assumed in the Scriptures (33). He states: "The main reason for my focusing upon these non negotiable principles is that Christians may be encouraged not to negotiate with their validity." He goes on to say that - "when defending the faith, rejecting any one of these could prove fatal in a believer's case for God" (30).

Second, Sproul argues that Aquinas did believe that God could only be found with the aid of God's grace. Sproul then argues that since God created a rationale world, grace and nature point to the same God. This means that it is legitimate and necessary to logically prove the existence of God. Sproul develops the idea that Aquinas did not split nature from grace,

In the next section, Sproul uses the cosmological and the ontological arguments to rationally prove the idea of an ultimate reality. This ultimate reality has gone by many names, “the mind” (Thales), the good (Plato) or the “unmoved mover” first cause, pure form (Aristotle). Sproul summarizes his goal as “What we have endeavored to claim by rationale arguments is the same thing that Aristotle and other pagan philosophers have demonstrated: the ultimate cause in the universe is uncaused, eternal and lacking in nothing whatsoever” (139).

Sproul then links this philosophical, rational concept of God to the Scriptures. He argues that the rationale concept of God has many of the same characters as the biblical revelation of God. One argument that Sproul uses to link the two is that the Scriptures teach that God is unknowable. Since he is unknowable, we must not reject rationale or philosophic concepts of God.

Having drawn upon the philosophical to prove “God”, Sproul then draws upon the Scriptures to redefine Him into a biblical image. It is at this point that Sproul’s philosophic description of God is most challenged. On the one hand Sproul argues that we can rationally prove God, but he then redefines Him by using revelation rather than logic, so that the validity and usefulness of the logic is challenged. The reality is that in these sections, Sproul has switched from logic to revelation.

Appendix 3. Presuppositions and Liberation Theology

Liberation theology is important in the context of Africa and Latin America. It is also a powerful force in many of the black churches in North America as evidences by the March 2008 debate about Jeremiah Wrights (Barak Obama’s then pastor).

Liberation theology developed in the context of the Roman Catholic Church and the poverty of the first and third world split. It has Marxist overtones. It rejects the idealistic theology that speaks of salvation as being something out of this world, with the only job of the church being to save men’s souls. Liberation theologians claim that this ignores the real, “this world” aspects of the theology. They point to the Exodus to show that salvation is God’s action in this world in history. The paradigm that is developed is that God’s call to Moses was to free Israel—the slaves, the oppressed, the captives. Moses is a liberator. God’s salvation is to free the poor, not just of Israel, but all poor. Bishop Tutu, archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, has said that God is unconditionally on the side of the poor. His great Gospel cry was for their freedom from oppression. To liberation theologians, the deliverance of Israel defines God’s salvation—a current, present, and this world salvation. They claim this message is reaffirmed in the prophets’ calls for justice for the poor and the needy and God’s damnation upon the oppressed.

Gustavo Gutierrez (*The Theology of Liberation* 153) argues that the history of salvation is the heart of human history. He argues that the interpretive split between timeless spiritual truths and concrete historical situations must be rejected. Salvation is here, now.

Jose Miguez Boninio, (*Revolutionary Theology comes of Age 72*) states: There is not truth outside or beyond the concrete historical events in which men are involved as agents.

This paradigm is developed in both Africa and Latin America. God is seen as being for the exploited, the lowly, the downtrodden, and against the owners of the means of production. Landowners, the capitalists, and the factory owners are identified as Pharaoh, God's enemy. Since God is on the side of the poor, the church must also be active in this struggle. For the rich to love their neighbors they must stop exploiting them; the church must join this battle now or it does not love its neighbor.

Foundational distinction is that there are no timeless truths—truths that are separate from action here and now in the flow of history. It also argues that true salvation is here and now, to be acted upon and realized in this life. There is also a difference in the theory of knowledge. It argues that in the Western mind there is the timeless idea and then many applications of that idea in his world. In contrast, the liberation theologian argues that action is itself the truth. Bonino (72) states, “you cannot know the truth except by doing the truth, and that means action for the liberation for the oppressed.”

This raises a number of issues. 1. Is there any dualism in the Bible? Is the Exodus to be spiritualized, idealized in the New Testament? 2. Is the Exodus just a story of present social justice and Jesus is likewise on a mission (all be it a failed one) to establish social justice upon the earth? 3. What is the nature of salvation now, as distinct from in the future and how is the church to bridge the gap between them?

Three solutions to this have been put forwards by liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez. First, liberation is political liberation, which emphasizes the conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed. Second, there is a cultural aspect of liberation that is a continuous process by which humans throughout history have been assuming a conscious responsibility for their own destiny. Third, there is a spiritual liberation, a liberation from sin and a restoration into fellowship with God.

We will answer the issues raised by liberation theology by using our standard apologetic method. First we will identify and critique the presuppositions made; then we will offer a biblical answer to those same issues.

Behind liberation theology is a concern with suffering a social justice in the world today. While this is certainly a biblical theme, it is not the sole or major theme of the Scriptures, which is Christ and the redemption He brings. When issues of social justice become so important that they control our interpretation of the Scriptures itself, we will lose this focus.

Liberation theology raised a number of complex issues. I have given a very simple biblical answer to some of those issues below. In answer to the issues raised by liberation theology this we need to understand a number of issues: The true nature of sin, the idea of progressive revelation in the Scriptures and the eschatology of salvation.

The biblical understanding of sin is that sin corrupts all in Adam. This means that all men, human institutions, and even the Creation itself are under the wrath and curse of God. Salvation is not being taken from this world; rather, salvation is the ending of this world in judgment and the bringing in of a new Creation. In this sense we are to read the liberation of Israel, not just as a liberation from oppression; but we are to see that the liberation is typological, not dualistic, an Old Testament type pointing forwards to the complete liberation of the Sons of God into a new Creation (Ex. 4:22, Gal. 4:4-6). In the fullness of the new Creation the injustices of this world will be met. On the issue of how we are to see current social justice, we are to recognize that the kingdom is here, and yet the kingdom is currently a hidden kingdom, one manifested in weakness, not strength, one modeled after the King's own earthly life and death. Upon the earth, Jesus Himself received no justice; He waited for God's vindication in the resurrection from the dead. Even so the church and kingdom will see limited justice in this world. They are to do what they can to seek justice and mercy, but they are to recognize the limits of the kingdom in this life.

From this we see the following principles: liberation theology runs the risk of placing its own ideological issues above those of the Scriptures. We must let Scripture interpret Scripture, not our own social concerns or ideologies. We will also see that a wrong emphasis on one point of theology when it becomes dominant is as dangerous as having a completely wrong philosophy. An imbalanced theology is as dangerous as any heresy, for if the imbalance becomes too strong, it will so distort the Scriptures as to create another Gospel.

Appendix 3. Reading

Bachelor Level

Part 1: An Introduction to Apologetics

http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame_articles/2001Blind.htm

<http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/PA100.htm>

<http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/PA013.htm>

Part 2. Reading in the method of apologetics

2.1. Tools in Apologetics

<http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pa101.htm>

2.2 Worshipping the Creature not the creator

<http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pa012.htm>

2.3 Jerusalem and Athens

<http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pa045.htm>

Part 3. Specific objections to Christianity

3.1. The problem of miracles

<http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pa165.htm>

3.2. The problem of Evil

Read all 4 parts of this article. <http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pa110.htm>.

http://www.desiringgod.org/Blog/788_does_god_empermit_sin

http://www.desiringgod.org/Blog/788_does_god_empermit_sin/4

Conclusion - The heart of the matter.

<http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pa110.htm>

Master Level

Web Reading for Bachelors above plus
Dr. Neal Hegeman's Apologetics Course, www.Mints.edu, English Hegeman

Appendix 4: Special Project

This is a practical project, requiring students to use the information that they have received. Each student is to go to an unbeliever from another culture. The student is to ask the unbeliever about his worldview to ascertain his views on God, Creation, sin and the final judgment. Then the student seeks to expose the unbeliever's presuppositions, and critique them for consistency. Using these issues the student then puts forward a positive Gospel argument. Bachelor level students 5 -7 pages; Master level students 10-15 pages.

INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL

Lesson One Answers

1. 1 Peter 3:15.
2. It allows us to give a reasoned explanation of the faith.
3. Apologetics is related to and integrated with all areas of Theology, Mission and Evangelism.
4. The use of evidence to prove Christianity.
5. The use of logic to prove truth, particularly God's existence or the truth of the Scriptures.
6. It Presupposes God's existence and argues from that perspective to show the validity of Christian theism.
7. That the Scriptures use all three methods above and so we should.
8. It is interpreting of Scripture within a particular social context. This context controls the interpretation of the Scripture.
9. No, the signs pointed to His fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies and so showed that He was the Christ. They did not show His divinity independent of the Scriptures.
10. God has revealed Himself and His works in a story. We must use this story in our defense of the faith.

Lesson Two Answers

1. Classical and Evidentialists seek a neutral, middle ground upon which the believer and unbeliever can agree.
2. Classical and Presuppositional
3. No, the believer and the unbeliever will have no middle or neutral ground.
4. Our theology should control our apologetic method. A constant application of reformed theology will tend towards presuppositional apologetics.
5. Aquinas believed that man was still able to do good, so he believed in the classical apologetic method.
6. No, it holds that because of the Fall he cannot be neutral; he is hostile to God.
7. No, all facts are interpreted within a framework.
8. Exposing the unbeliever's sin.
9. Our Presuppositions.
10. We are to show him that he is not neutral and that he is working from an anti-God worldview.

Lesson Three Answers

1. A personal universe.
2. God is personal and He is in absolute control of all things.
3. The Trinity shows us that God is mysterious; God is always in fellowship; God is independent from the Creation and He is complete in Himself.
4. An axiom that seems so central that it cannot be contradicted, it must be accepted by all parties.
5. It is using all of Creation, providence and the Scriptures to illustrate God being.
6. We are to use the Scriptures to interpret Creation.
7. Emotions are part of the Creation. Our emotions reflect truth.
8. He is not capable of objective truth without God's aid.
9. He has derivative knowledge. He was never made to understand anything apart from God.
10. No philosophy of the last hundred years believes in or seeks absolute truth.

Lesson Four Answers

1. Scripture Revelation and Faith
2. He can do so because he is His image.
- 3: Interpretive: man must interpret God. Derivative: he can only know what God shows or reveals to him. He can know nothing originally.
4. Her own reason and the evidence of her eyes.
5. It means that man is not neutral but is hostile to God.
6. It shows man's position before God. Man knows there is a God but he is under God's wrath and he suppresses the truth.
7. Chapter 6.5 The Fall, willful rebellion of man, now affects every part of his being. Theologically, this is called original sin.
8. To purposely and actively and willfully deny God's claims upon him.
9. Man is still in God's image and he must still fulfill his Creation mandate, but he has twisted it to serve himself, not God.
10. God's incidental goodness to man as He uses man to fulfill His purposes in this world.

Lesson Five Answers

1. Yes, they were very well educated, a highly developed culture.
2. Yes, the Areopagus was a formal and legal gathering.
3. He was fully trained as a Jew and he was fully trained in Greek thinking and he was called by Jesus to proclaim the Gospel.
4. He argues an entire worldview.
5. He shows the hidden tension in their system; they know that there is an unknown God and that God is like men, not bricks and stone.
6. The revealed will of God.
7. No, Paul states both worldviews and presents the full Gospel.
8. He tells that that they know about God's power, guidance and glory. (26-28)
9. Yes, God commands all men to repentance.
10. We are to expose their worldview and presuppositions and critique it. We are to present our own worldview from the Scriptures and show how Creation is consistent with it. We are to call them to repentance.

Lesson Six Answers

1. Circular reasoning runs from a maxim that cannot be proven.
2. All men ultimately believe in unprovable assumptions.
3. Faith is not unreasonable.
4. We cannot reason *to faith* as reason is not enough to lead to faith, but if we begin from the position *of faith* we will see it is not unreasonable.
5. It is reasoning that is based upon ultimate presupposition that cannot be proven.
6. We say we believe the Bible because it says it is true.
7. All men have axioms that they start their thinking from. These are unprovable and any argument will circle back to them.
8. Narrowly circular reasoning can be reduced to arguing that I believe the Scriptures are true because they say so. Broadly circular reasoning also believes the Bible is true because it says so but it develops the truths of the Scriptures in a broad way allowing issues such as God's sovereignty, man's sin and salvation to be talked about.
9. Broadly circular reasoning gives us an opportunity to display the truth of the Gospel.

10 Since man is still in God's image, he cannot truly deny the truths presented to him.

Lesson Seven Answers

1. If God is good and God is sovereign, why does suffering exist?
2. Suffering builds character; Adams was originally made perfect; he did not need to suffer.
3. False, God is sovereign over all, both Good and Evil.
4. God controls all things, but men do the actual, immediate and direct actions so God is not directly responsible.
5. God is outside the Law He gives to men.
6. He states He does not have to give account to men and will challenge their right to judge Him or their own righteousness.
7. We don't know what God is doing and we may never know.
8. God's greatest good is His own glory, but His own glory is also tied to His people's good.
9. God is absolutely sovereign in every aspect of men's election and salvation
10. His own Glory.

Lesson Eight Answers

1. Over time in history.
2. Israel is sinful and so God should judge her, not bless her.
3. When Christ comes He pays for the sins that had earlier been committed which God had previously passed over.
4. We are to remember that just as Israel's problems were fixed by God in due time, God will fix our problem in a way that is just.
5. Revelation 15:3, 4; 16:5-7.
6. It shows us how we will feel about God in the final judgment.
7. To show His justice, so we enter the sufferings of Christ, as a warning.
9. Although Jesus' sufferings alone can save, in order for Paul to bless the church, he must also suffer.
10. God makes us into the image of His Son. He disciplines His children to train them in this.

READING LIST

Apologetics

Frame: *Apologetics to the Glory of God* 263
 Bahnsen: *Van Till's Apologetic* 764
 Van Till: *Defense of the Faith* 299
 Bahnsen: *Always Ready* 289
 RC Sproul: *Defending your Faith* 206
 Moo: *Romans* 73
 Dr. Michael Payne: Lectures 100
 John Pollock: *Apostle, A life of Paul* 6 David Cook
 Bruce, ff Apostle of the Heart Set Free, 13
 Bruce, ff Book of Acts 15
 Conybeare: *Life and Epistles of Saint Paul* 31
 Taylor: *The Apostle Paul* 18
 McCleod: *The Shared Life* 93
 Wolterstorff: Nicholas Reason within the Bounds of Religion 161
 Plasher: *Unapologetic Theology* 177
 Schaffer: Trilog 361
 Newbegin: *The Open Secret* 131
 Carson: *How Long, O Lord?* 271
 Bruce: *Romans* 110
 Moo: *Romans* 95
 Thomas: "Intro to Reformed Theology", RTS lectures 25 x1 hour = 500 words.
 "The Passion of the Western Mind" - 544
 Adams, Peter: Preaching- Speaking Gods word 173
 Total 4563

Web

Frame: Blind Begger 8
 Bahnsen: Answering Objections 23
 Bahnsen: Evangelism and apologetics 19
 Bahnsen: Tools of Apologetics 37
 Worship: 93
 Bahnsen: Jerusalem and Athens 53
 Bahnsen: Miracles 21
 Bahnsen: Problem of Faith 42
 Hegeman: Apologetics 91
 Bible.org- Faith has its reasons - A History of Evidentialism 40
 Bible.org – Faith Has its reasons – Presenting Evidence that Demands a verdict 51
 Total 455

Total 5018