

APOLOGETICS IN CONVERSATION

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INTRODUCTION

Our subject is apologetics. Specifically, I have in mind the intellectual vindication of the biblical worldview and the destruction of all non-biblical worldviews in the context of informal debates, such as in personal conversations.

Formal debates are regulated by elaborate rules, time limitations, and participants are often called upon to defend or refute previously announced propositions. These factors combine to construct a rather artificial environment for intellectual confrontations. In order to gain the advantage in such a situation, one must not only understand the intellectual merits of his position and the fallacies in his opponent's position, but he must know how to convincingly present his arguments within the restrictions imposed by the rules of formal debate. He must think and operate strategically.

Most people rarely if ever participate in formal debates. They are more likely to debate the intellectual merits of their beliefs in informal settings – at home, at work, with strangers on the plane, or with professors in the classroom. Of course, even in these situations, one must think and operate strategically – some moves are still better than others.

One difference is that the flow of the intellectual confrontation is no longer molded by the rules of formal debate. But it is also true that even informal debates are often restricted by time limitations, the willingness of the participants, and so forth. Some situations permit the conversation to last for only several minutes, in which case the believer must perform an immediate "take down" of the unbeliever's position, sum up the biblical worldview the best he can, and in general try to say enough for his hearer to ponder later.

Thus perhaps the informal debate in which every issue is thoroughly discussed remains a rarity or even an ideal. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for a private discussion on religion to last several hours, and sometimes to be carried on for even weeks or months. This allows the Christian to completely present and defend the biblical worldview, and to thoroughly examine and destroy the non-Christian's entire belief system.

Although the biblical approach to apologetics can easily function and triumph in both formal and informal debates, an informal setting presents the Christian with a delicious opportunity. A champion boxer might be able to knock down his opponent whether in a boxing ring or on the street. The difference is that nobody is "saved by the bell" in a street fight, thus giving our champion the opportunity to thoroughly bludgeon his opponent.

Likewise, although the biblical approach to apologetics can devastate the non-Christians in any setting, the restrictions of formal debates provide them with some measure of protection from our relentless attacks. Of course, in informal debates, our opponents can still abort the confrontation by fleeing our presence, but their pride often holds them captive, and this gives us the opportunity to make our victory obvious and complete.

In what follows, I will present a number of principles in biblical apologetics¹ that enhance our performance and effectiveness when defending the faith in informal settings. These often neglected principles sound simple, but they are the divine weapons that God has given to us to ensure our victory in spiritual and intellectual confrontations against unbelievers and blasphemers.

Since the proper understanding and application of these principles are possible only when one has as his intellectual foundation a biblical system of theology, a biblical perspective on philosophy, and a biblical approach to apologetics, I will be mainly addressing those who are already familiar with some of my previous works, especially my *Systematic Theology*, *Ultimate Questions*, and *Presuppositional Confrontations*,² and who are in essential agreement with what I have written.

This is of paramount importance because, when given time to operate, a biblical approach to apologetics will obliterate any unbiblical idea, theory, argument, or worldview. Thus, for example, if the Christian himself holds to an unbiblical view of epistemology, he will discover that the biblical arguments that he uses against the unbeliever's epistemology will also destroy his own unbiblical epistemology. This is just to say that an effective strategy against non-Christian beliefs will also destroy our own remaining non-Christian beliefs.

Paul sometimes employs warfare metaphors when he talks about our conflict with demonic forces and anti-biblical ideas, and so some parts of our discussion on apologetics will arise from them and refer to them. Because many people have become especially sensitive to warfare language in the context of religion, let me state at the outset that when I employ such language, I am speaking metaphorically. I refer to spiritual warfare – intellectual conflicts that are resolved by rational arguments and not by physical violence. Some people's preference might be for us to avoid warfare metaphors altogether, but since Scripture itself uses these metaphors, such a preference is itself a "pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5), and therefore it is a preference that I refuse to accommodate.

There are those who assert that if a person is zealously committed to his religion, then he is by definition a dangerous fanatic, even like a terrorist. They say this without regard for what the religion actually teaches, and whether what it teaches is true. Some of them assume that all religions are false and dangerous in the first place, so that religious zeal is never productive, let alone rationally justified. This is an ignorant and irrational position, and again, it is one of those ideas that we can refute by biblical apologetics, and that we must demand non-Christians to defend.

¹ Since I believe that my approach to apologetics has been faithfully derived from the Bible, I will refer to "my approach" and the "biblical approach" interchangeably, just as I would call Christianity "my faith," "my religion," or "my worldview," and Christian theology "my theology." I would deny that my approach to apologetics is the result of my own philosophical speculation or reflection; instead, I assert that it is the same approach as the one taught in and implied by Scripture.

² Also see *Captive to Reason*, *Invincible Faith*, *Blasphemy and Mystery*, *The Light of Our Minds*, and *On Good and Evil*.

As for me, I am not ashamed of Paul's warfare metaphors. I will make my meaning clear to prevent misunderstandings, but I will not apologize for giving Scripture's warfare language full expression, recognition, adaptation, and application in my writings. No, I am not ashamed of Paul, but I am ashamed of those professing Christians who shrink back from patterning their speech after God's word. Some people will still distort and criticize, but I refuse to be bullied into submission, and bullied into abandoning biblical expressions and thinking patterns.

Finally, the following principles are not to be taken as steps to be used in any rigid manner; rather, they represent attitudes and strategies that the Christian must keep in mind during debate, flexibly and fluidly blending them together in natural conversation as he confronts unbelievers and heretics with the wisdom and power of Christ.

1. AFFIRM THE INEVITABLE

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 1:18-31)

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:14-16)

The Bible teaches that, in accordance with his own wisdom, God has determined that human wisdom would never discover the true nature of reality, the foundation of which is God himself. He has also determined to place the wisdom that leads to salvation beyond the reach of human speculation. By this, he intends to frustrate human wisdom, to destroy human pride, and to crush every human aspiration that exalts itself against the wisdom of God. All non-Christian systems of thought begin, proceed, and end in intellectual and practical failure. Thus God has made all non-Christian religions and philosophies foolish and futile.

Non-Christian worldviews are foolish because they are irrational. A rational way of thinking and knowing arrives at conclusions validly and necessarily deduced from true premises. But non-Christians have no way of knowing true premises, and neither do they reason by valid deductions; instead, they make themselves the ultimate reference point for knowledge, falsely supposing that they could discover the nature of reality through intuition, sensation, and induction. The alleged revelations in non-Christian religions are no different, since they are in fact human inventions.

Non-Christian worldviews are futile because, being foolish, they cannot discover the highest good; moreover, they fail to attain even their own designated ends. Those that promise social utopias end in poverty and oppression, those that preach nirvana result in failure and disappointment, if not insanity, and those that profess to seek God apart from the biblical revelation achieve nothing but ensure their followers a place in hell. Apart from biblical revelation, all human thinking and all human striving result in utter futility – in defeat, despair, and death.

If anyone were to discover truth and attain salvation, it must be by God's sovereign grace and effectual calling. In accordance with his own will, God often calls and saves those who are considered inferior by human standards, and he has chosen them in order to embarrass and frustrate those who rely on and judge by these human standards. He uses the "lowly things" and "despised things" to bring to nothing those who consider themselves something. Of course, even now we speak relatively, for God is the one who creates and orders all things. Whether we refer to the lowly things that he uses or the might things that he frustrates, God is the one who makes them and arranges them in their places, so that he might accomplish his plan and demonstrate his power, wisdom, justice, and grace.

All this is God's will and God's design. He does it so that no one may boast about himself, and that if anyone were to boast, he may boast only about what God has done in Christ. God's will is not only that man cannot attain salvation by his own sinful reasoning, but that he cannot attain even rationality and knowledge by his own power. The Bible does not contrast between the native human abilities of the Christians and the non-Christians; rather, it makes a contrast between man's abilities and God's abilities – between human power and divine power, the wisdom of man and the wisdom of God. When these are pitted against each other, there is no contest, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."

If even "the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom," then if a person can obtain even a small portion of divine wisdom, he will be able to easily and utterly crush any debate opponent who operates on human wisdom. This is the basis for victory in biblical apologetics. God has revealed a portion of his divine wisdom in Scripture, and those whom he has summoned to himself by the gospel are granted to learn and affirm its teachings. Thus they share God's perspective; they share a portion of God's knowledge; they know something about God's way of thinking, and they begin to pattern their thoughts after him. In short, they have "the mind of Christ."

It follows that as long as we depend on God's wisdom, as long as we adhere to the biblical worldview as revealed in Scripture – that is, as long as we follow the mind of Christ and not revert to our former way of thinking – we will be able to easily and utterly crush any non-Christian in debate. Just as no non-Christian can defeat the mind of Christ, no non-Christian can defeat anyone who follows the mind of Christ in all that he thinks and believes.

The only reason a Christian would appear to lose when debating a non-Christian is that the Christian has failed to stay close to God's way of thinking, but he has in some way reverted to the non-Christian way, so that he attempts to use non-Christian wisdom to defend the Christian worldview. Because non-Christian thinking is so irrational and conflicting, amidst the confusion the Christian might often appear to succeed even if he fails to use biblical arguments, but this is not how a Christian should win any debate. In any case, clear and decisive victory is ours when we arrange the debate to pit human wisdom against divine wisdom.

I say all of this to get across one of the most important principles in biblical apologetics – namely, if you learn and apply the biblical approach to apologetics, you will be able to decisively crush any non-Christian in debate. You will be able to completely bewilder and embarrass any unbeliever.

Of course, there are basic and advanced principles when it comes to biblical apologetics, but as long as one possesses the minimal mental capacity to learn several simple maneuvers that serve to apply biblical knowledge and sound reasoning to an intellectual discussion, even a toddler who has learned biblical apologetics can demolish a professor of science or philosophy in a matter of seconds.

The gaps in education and experience would make only a superficial difference. What matters would be the toddler's ability to clearly confront the professor's human wisdom with the Bible's divine wisdom. As David said to Goliath, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied" (1 Samuel 17:45). Goliath's human strength was irrelevant, because David was going up against him with divine power. Likewise, an old educated moron is still a moron, and all he has more of is pride, not wisdom. In contrast, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding" (Psalm 111:10).

Some of you might not understand why I say that this is one of the most important principles in biblical apologetics. Since it is a biblical teaching, you might agree that it is true, and perhaps think that it is good to know, but you cannot imagine how it would help you become a more effective apologist. Nevertheless, not only is this one of the most important principles in biblical apologetics, but for some people, and especially those who have already learned the basics of biblical apologetics, it is *the* missing factor in their quest to becoming invincible defenders of the faith.

For many Christians, the number one hindrance in apologetics is their respect for or even fear of non-Christian minds and ideas. These Christians have been told, often by the non-Christians themselves, that the non-Christians are the intellectual elite of this world. Even Christian ministers often tell their congregations that non-Christians are highly intelligent, and that many of their ideas are deep and brilliant. So when the typical Christian comes up against a non-Christian in debate, he often assumes that although the non-Christian is ultimately wrong, this opponent will still present numerous intelligent questions and difficult objections against the Christian faith, and that even if he manages to overcome the non-Christian's intellectual assault, there will be a hard struggle, and the result will not be clear and decisive.

This false belief about the non-Christian's intelligence produces a strong mental block in many aspiring apologists. Christians often ask me how to answer certain questions and objections from unbelievers. Sometimes I can understand why they do not know how to answer, as when these have to do with Christian doctrines that not all believers have studied.³ However, more often than not it would seem that the Christians should be able to easily answer them without asking me, especially those who have already learned the basics of biblical apologetics. Many are hindered because they falsely assume that the questions and objections from the non-Christians must be more intelligent than they seem, and thus must be more difficult to answer than they appear.

I despise all non-Christian worldviews, philosophies, and religions. All non-Christian ideas are detestable to me. Certainly, this is but an elementary identification with the mind of Christ and the wrath of God against all non-Christian thought; nevertheless, its power is such that my mind is liberated to perceive the utter stupidity and futility of the non-Christians, and the fallacies and vulnerabilities in their thinking. However, most Christians do not possess this low estimation of non-Christian intelligence. For this reason, they remain blind to the true strength of the biblical worldview, and blind to the roll-on-the-floor, sidesplittingly laughable lunacy of all non-Christian thinking. In fact, even to Christian apologists, this is perhaps one of the most repulsive aspects of my teachings on apologetics, but this is why they will never unleash the full power of biblical apologetics to destroy our opponents, and this is why their answers to non-Christians are feeble, indecisive, and compromising.

In 2 Kings 6, we read that the king of Aram had sent his army to capture Elisha. When the horses and chariots surrounded the prophet and his servant, the servant panicked and asked, "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" Elisha told him, "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them," and then he prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." "Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (see v. 11-17). Likewise, divine wisdom and power are on our side, but we need to pray for spiritual sight, so that we may perceive the wisdom of God as well as the folly of the heathens.

³ This is why although what we are now discussing is just *one* of the most important principles in biblical apologetics, *the* single most important thing that you can do to become a better apologist is to study systematic theology.

Again, even Christian ministers who are otherwise sound in doctrine extol the wisdom of unbelieving men, but this is unbiblical, unproductive, and unnecessary. Rather, the Bible teaches that all non-Christians are foolish and futile, stupid and sinful. At best, their ideas are wise only according to human standards; that is, they appear to be wise only when they approve themselves, and when they judge themselves by their own stupid and sinful standards. But from God's perspective – that is, from the objective, realistic, and biblical perspective – all unbelieving thoughts are irrational and rebellious. Let Christian ministers, then, speak in agreement with Scripture, instead of sending mixed messages to our people that undermine their confidence and obscure their spiritual vision.

Of course, I am not suggesting that we should underestimate our opponents, but we must not avoid underestimating them by *overestimating* them. We must not affirm false assumptions about them, but we ought to evaluate our opponents in the light of biblical wisdom: "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:22). In other words, they think they are smart, but they are stupid. Non-Christians are extremely stupid people. Every professing Christian who refuses to accept and apply this truth should tear out this page from his Bible, or better yet, abandon apologetics altogether. Leave it to those of us who really mean it to contend for the faith.

We avoid becoming careless in debate by meticulously listening to the arguments from our opponents, scrutinizing every word, every proposition, the relationship between every word and every proposition, every inference and every implication. We avoid underestimating our opponents by committing ourselves to use overwhelming intellectual force in dismantling every aspect of their worldviews, philosophies, and religions. We are satisfied with nothing less than the total intellectual annihilation of all aspects of their systems of thought. And we can do this because even the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and by God's word and God's Spirit, we indeed have the very mind of Christ. On the other hand, some believers expect such high competence from their opponents that they blind themselves to the glaring errors that pervade all anti-biblical arguments.

On the basis that God has rendered all non-Christians stupid and feeble, that divine wisdom is infinitely greater than human wisdom, and that I have received the mind of Christ through God's Spirit and God's Scripture, I engage every question, objection, or argument with the certain knowledge that there is no non-Christian in all the world who can defeat me or even give me a little trouble in debate. It does not matter whether he is an atheist or a Buddhist, a Muslim or a Mormon, a scientist or a philosopher. As long as his worldview is not identical to that of the Bible, there is no chance that he can defeat me. In fact, if all the non-Christians in the entire history of humankind were to band together against me, it would not make one bit of difference. If they cannot defeat God, they cannot defeat me. On the other hand, given the needed conditions – for example, that there is a sufficient amount of time and that both sides are willing and able to complete the debate – I will seize total and decisive victory every time.

We can also consider this principle from the perspective of faith or unbelief. If you are a Christian, then you ought to believe the Bible. If you believe the Bible, then you ought to

believe that divine wisdom is greater than human wisdom, and that God has granted you some of his wisdom, that he has allowed you to see things from his perspective, and that he has revealed to you some of his thoughts, so that you have the mind of Christ. If you have the mind of Christ, if you think in line with divine wisdom, then provided that you do not deviate from this way of thinking, no non-Christian can defeat you in debate; instead, you will be able to see through and refute any non-Christian argument and position.

You can either allow unbelief to hinder you, or unleash divine wisdom to devastate your opponents by faith. You can say with the unbelieving Israelites, "We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them" (Numbers 13:33). Or, on the basis that God has made all non-Christians stupid and feeble, you can say with Joshua and Caleb, "Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them" (14:9).

I know that I will win every time because my approach to apologetics depends wholly on biblical revelation. This confidence is not based on any unique intellectual endowment that I think I possess, but it is based on the superiority of God's wisdom as revealed in Scripture, which is available to, and in principle affirmed by, every Christian. Therefore, if you learn to depend wholly on biblical wisdom as you defend the faith, you will also win every time. If you have been paying attention, and if you are receptive to the words of Scripture that I have communicated to you, then you are likely sensing a new confidence arising in your heart. This is not a confidence in yourself, but it is a legitimate and rational confidence in the greatness and superiority of God's wisdom.

We do not claim to be intellectually superior to the non-Christians in ourselves; rather, we freely admit that, by human standards, many of us were intellectually inferior to the unbelievers before our conversion, and when judged by God's standards, we were fools just like all the non-Christians. However, since then, God has sovereignly regenerated and enlightened us, and by imparting to us the very mind of Christ, he has made us intellectually superior to all non-Christians. Therefore, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

2. ATTACK THE ENEMY

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

Some of our opponents are outwardly hostile. They mock us, insult us, and call us names.⁴ They regard us as fools, fanatics, and the scum of the earth, and they are not afraid to tell us this. Others appear more normal, and they will talk to you about religion seemingly with the same attention and respect that they will show when speaking about serious matters with non-Christians. Then, some appear so polite that they sound patronizing and obnoxious.

As long as they are all non-Christians, these are all superficial differences. Many Christians wish to consider their religious discussions with non-Christians as friendly dialogues between fellow human beings who are both interested in discovering truth through rational investigation. This is unbiblical and unrealistic. Indeed, many unbelievers put on a sincere and courteous front, but God looks at the thoughts and intentions of men, and not just their appearance and demeanor.

You might protest that, unlike God, we cannot directly perceive people's hearts; however, it does not follow that we must therefore judge people according to their appearance. In another context, Jesus said, "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment" (John 7:24). It is true that we cannot directly perceive people's hearts, but we do not need to, because the Bible tells us what is in their hearts. It tells us what God perceives when he looks past their appearance. When God looks at them, he does not see a group of civilized and educated gentlemen, but he sees a generation of vipers, lewd beasts, stubborn mules, and vicious dogs. He sees a group of God-haters, idolaters, and morons.

⁴ Here I am referring only to instances when our opponents call us derogatory names without rational justification. Contrary to what many people think, "name-calling" is not always an informal fallacy. If the derogatory name or label appears in the context of a valid argument, or is the result of this argument, then the name or label is in fact a proper description or a logical conclusion, not a fallacy. For example, I have a rational right to call the atheist a "moron" if I have rational justification for applying this word to the atheist, or if it comes at the end of a sound argument. Just because some people do not like this logical conclusion does not make it a fallacy; rather, to protest against it without logical justification is itself a fallacy. For someone to commit a name-calling *fallacy*, he must commit some *logical* error in his application of the name or label. This is true for both Christians and non-Christians. If the person who applies the name or label can demonstrate that it fits his opponent, then it cannot be a fallacy, no matter how insulting it sounds. Also, if the application of the name or label is in fact part of the person's worldview, then he must be permitted to express it just as he is permitted to express any part of his worldview during the course of debate, so that his beliefs can be discussed and examined, and so that he can tell his opponent precisely what he affirms and wishes to defend.

All men and women are born sinful and rebellious, and because all non-Christians have never been converted by God, they remain sinful and rebellious, no matter how sincere and courteous they try to appear. As Christians, we are indeed intellectually and morally superior, but we are superior only because God has changed us and made us superior by his sovereign grace, and not by our own will or work. We admit that we were just as stupid and evil as our non-Christian opponents, but this does not change the fact that they are indeed stupid and evil, that their friendly appearance is superficial and hypocritical, and that their gentle speech is insincere and dishonest.

When a non-Christian claims to seek understanding about our faith, or even when he claims to seek salvation through Christ, and even if God would eventually regenerate and convert him, as long as he is still an unbeliever and unregenerate at that moment, then at that moment he is still inwardly insincere and spiritually hostile. As John Gerstner writes in his *Theology in Dialogue*:

C: No. God makes no promises to his unregenerate enemies.

I: You are a hard master.

C: I admit that these things are very stern, but I do remind you that a sinner is an enemy of God. He has declared war on God. You are such a sinner and you are at war with God.

I: Even though I am seeking God?

C: Yes, I cannot remind you too often that you are not *truly* seeking Him.... This is where Paul's use of that language in Romans 3 comes in. He says there that none seeks after God. What he means is that no one in his natural fallen state sincerely seeks after God. There are some in the fallen state who, shall I say, insincerely seek after God, as you are doing now....⁵

I: What makes you say that the Bible says I do not mean what I say? Where does the Bible say that I do not want to come to Christ?

C: Christ says Himself, in John 3:19, "This is the condemnation, that light has come into the world and men love the darkness rather than the light." In other words, Christ says that unconverted persons do not come to Him who is the light of the world. They do not want to come to Him because they love the darkness and He is the light. According to your own confession, you are still an unconverted person. That means you are a lover of darkness, not of light. Consequently, you cannot sincerely want to come to Christ.⁶

⁵ John H. Gerstner, *Theology in Dialogue* (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996), p. 406-407.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 426-427.

In other words, because an unbeliever is still inwardly rebellious toward God, even when he appears to sincerely inquire about your faith, there is always an evil ulterior motive. Of course, if God has chosen him for salvation, then it may be that God has ordained the occasion to convert him. His conversion would then still be a result of God's sovereign grace, on the occasion of his inquiry, and in spite of his evil motive. The non-Christian himself might be deceived, and thinks that he is asking honest questions out of a sincere motive to understand; however, as long as he remains unconverted, he is inquiring out of pride, rebellion, and selfishness, and he remains an enemy and a hater of God.

This does not mean you should become outwardly hostile to non-Christians, but you ought to consider our intellectual engagement with them as a spiritual war. If you pay attention to only the superficial signs, and if you are looking for only physical indications of antagonism, then indeed our debates and discussions with non-Christians often do not appear overly hostile. However, the absence of physical violence does not indicate the absence of hostility because we are talking about a spiritual war, and the spiritual hostility between Christians and non-Christians. When we notice the differences in thoughts and motives, ideas and beliefs, then we perceive that our intellectual engagement with unbelievers is a war between good and evil, between wisdom and folly, and between God and Satan.

Christians too often address non-Christians on the basis of their common humanity, and it seems to them that the engagement is just a friendly dialogue between peers about the important issues of life. In fact, many of their evangelistic and apologetic efforts are so man-centered that it is as if they are standing with the unbelievers on one side, while God is on the other side. However, as Christians, we must address non-Christians on the basis of what we have in common with God and with other Christians, and on the basis of our differences and disagreements with non-Christians. Jesus said that whoever is not with him is against him; therefore, if you are on the side of Christ, all non-Christians are on the other side in opposition against you and your Lord. As Paul writes:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." (2 Corinthians 6:14-17)

Although we can have friendly relationships with non-Christians on the superficial level, Scripture insists that we are at war with them on the spiritual level. Thus when you speak to an unbeliever about your faith, do not regard it as an instance of two human beings joining together to seek truth. You already have the truth – you are explaining and defending it, while the non-Christian is resisting it, challenging it, and blaspheming it.

Whether he uses a friendly or hostile demeanor is of only superficial importance. As long as he is a non-Christian, he is defying your God, and it is not up to you to be indifferent or dispassionate about it; rather, you must place your jealousy for God's honor far above your concern and sympathy for the unbeliever. Man-centered empathy is to be discarded altogether. God sees the situation as war; therefore, you must also see it as war. Failing to see our situation as God sees it is to defy God, and to stifle apologetics.

In connection with this, it is unbiblical for Christians to sharply distinguish people with their beliefs and actions. It is indeed convenient to say, "I am not against you, I am against only your beliefs and actions," but this is an excuse that pays lip service to biblical teachings about the comprehensive conflict between Christians and non-Christians, and at the same time operate as if there is no conflict, so as to avoid offense and confrontation. Blasphemies and heresies do not invade people's mind by themselves – *people* embrace and spread them. Likewise, sins do not happen by themselves – *people* sin, and *they* sin because *they* are evil. Accordingly, the enemies of God are not just the unbiblical beliefs and actions, but the *people* who embrace these beliefs and perform these actions, and God is going to send both the unbelieving beliefs and the unbelieving people to hell.

Scripture indeed teaches that we do not war after "flesh and blood," and some take this to mean that the war has nothing to do with people altogether, but that it has to do with only their beliefs and actions, and perhaps also with demonic powers. However, this is contrary to biblical teaching, because even at the very beginning, God said that the conflict would be against the serpent's "offspring" (Genesis 3:15) – that is, not just the devil, but also the followers of the devil.

That we do not war after "flesh and blood" means only that our conflict is not physical, so that we do not employ physical strategies and weapons, and we do not seek to inflict physical injuries to our opponents. Rather, since the war is spiritual, our weapons are also spiritual, and instead of using guns and bombs, we pray, we preach, and we argue. In any case, Scripture recognizes that our opponents include people, and not just beliefs and actions, or even evil spirits, only that our conflict with these people cannot and should not be settled by physical violence, but instead by spiritual power and rational persuasion.

Since we are warring against non-Christians, and not just dialoguing with them, then just as fighting any war consists of both defense and offense, we must learn to perform both intellectual defense and offense in apologetics. Some Christians act as if apologetics is mainly or even solely about defense, about answering questions and neutralizing objections. Of course we must skillfully respond to questions and objections, but in a war, defense is only part of the fight.

As mentioned, as long as the non-Christian remains unconverted, he is not a sincere seeker. He never asks humble and honest questions; he does not want to understand and believe. Instead, with his whole heart he wants to defy God and justify himself. He speaks to you out of a strong but unjustified intellectual pride. He thinks that he is smart and rational, and that you are stupid and irrational. Since this is what he thinks, he will not approach you sincerely thinking that if you can answer several questions that still perplex him, then he

will surely believe. He does not sincerely think that you could be right, and that Christianity could be true to the exclusion of all other worldviews, philosophies, and religions.

Therefore, he will not accept defeat just because you are able to answer several of his questions and objections. In his thinking, you cannot possibly be right, and so he will keep on asking one question after another, and raising one objection after another. It does not mean that any of these questions and objections are rational or forceful, but this is irrelevant – he will continue to inquire and to challenge, even if each question or objection differs only on minor details. And the non-Christian will often continue to pose questions and objections that have already been addressed by more general statements that logically cover them all. But unbelievers are unintelligent and dishonest, and so they will keep on asking in the attempt to postpone admission of defeat.

Of course, this is not to say that the non-Christian cannot be defeated – any unbeliever can be easily, totally, and decisively defeated. But I am pointing out that, without the sovereign work of God in his heart, no unconverted person is sincerely prepared to accept the Christian faith. All of his questions and objections are insincere – they are just means of attack, not sincere questions and objections that pose as true hindrances to faith. Is the non-Christian really so concerned about the problem of evil so that he would come to faith if you give him a rational answer? Would the unbeliever really believe in Christ just because you argue for biblical infallibility in a way that he cannot rationally object? No, his questions and objections are just smoke screens. He will not accept your faith even if you answer all of his initial questions and objections – he will invent more. The unbeliever rejects the gospel because he is stupid and sinful, but at the same time insists that he is smart and moral.

Biblical apologetics indeed entails answering questions and objections to show that the Christian faith can provide a true and coherent response to any rational challenge; however, you must not just sit there and wait for the next question or objection. The unbeliever's stupidity and sinfulness cause him to think certain ways and to believe certain things, and as long as he finds safe harbor in his own way of thinking, he will continue to stubbornly invent silly questions and objections against the Christian faith. Therefore, in addition to defending your own biblical beliefs, you must launch a comprehensive, meticulous, and devastating attack against your opponent. You must initiate and maintain an offensive that destroys the non-Christian's very way of thinking, and either explicitly or implicitly destroy all of his unbiblical ideas.

For example, your opponent may boast that he believes in science, and claim that science contradicts Christianity, and therefore Christianity must be false. He might offer you an example of how the study of biology seems to contradict certain biblical teachings. Some Christians, if they know something about science, will either challenge the scientific assertion, or explain how it can be reconciled with biblical teachings. In addition to the fact that this might not be true (the current scientific conclusion might in fact contradict Scripture), the non-Christian will move on to another objection from biology, or to an objection from physics, and then chemistry, and then psychology, and so on. Again, it is

not that there is any force to these questions or objections, but the person who does not wish to admit defeat can always invent something to ask, no matter how stupid or dishonest.

Instead of enduring the non-Christian's endless questions and objections, you must attack his way of thinking, and the foundation of all his questions and objections. Since his intellectual pride lacks rational justification in the first place, unless God converts him, this pride will remain no matter what you do; however, you can expose the fact that his sense of intellectual superiority is irrational and unjustified. Indeed, you may respond to each of his scientific objections, but with each response, you must also follow an overall offensive strategy that undermines his claim to rationality. You must attack the rationality and the formulation of each of his scientific objections. You must challenge his reliance on science and the rationality of science itself – as we have shown in many places, science itself is irrational and can never discover anything about anything.⁷ You must question his very intelligence, and demonstrate that, like all non-Christians, he is a stupid person who cannot even handle the simplest ideas.

This is the biblical way. You must actively and endlessly attack everything about your opponent's thinking. You must demolish every argument and capture every thought. You must attack his beliefs more strongly and skillfully than he attacks yours. You must humiliate him, and expose the illusion that his pride is justified. Because this is what biblical apologetics demands, it follows that you must develop and perfect your "take down" technique in debate.

To begin, we should recall our discussion from the previous chapter, that because God has rendered all non-Christians foolish and futile, we can always defeat them in argumentation when we affirm a biblical system of theology and apply the principles of biblical apologetics. A specific application of this means that we can always defeat any question or objection raised against the Christian faith, and more than that, we can destroy every idea within our opponent's system of thought. Indeed, our task is to demolish every argument and capture every thought that defies what God has revealed in Scripture.

On this biblical basis, our broad offensive strategy is to attack *everything* in our opponent's worldview, everything he says, and everything he implies. We should turn every question into an opportunity to undermine his intellectual pride, and use every objection as a springboard to destroy his sense of intellectual superiority.

Those who attempt to learn my method of apologetics often fail to grasp or apply this principle. Perhaps they consider it an exaggeration, or perhaps they do not realize what "everything" entails, so I want to make this clear. When I say to attack everything, I mean *everything*, and everything about everything that has to do with anything in the opponent's system of thought. When I say "everything," I am referring to every word, every definition of every word, every implication of every word, every proposition, every connection between every proposition, every assumption, every speculation, every inference, every question, every objection, every contradiction – *everything*.

⁷ See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, and Captive to Reason*, among others.

This is not a strategy to avoid answering our opponents, nor is it an attempt to impede the progress of debate. We do answer our opponents, and we do facilitate progress in debate, but this principle of attack necessarily arises from our own worldview. That is, it is an inherent part of the Christian worldview to believe that all non-Christians begin from false first principles, and then by defective processes of reasoning, they have constructed their irrational worldviews. This irrationality pervades even the smallest and most insignificant aspects of their belief systems, so that we indeed believe that every detail in their worldviews is subject to challenge and refutation.

Since non-Christians appear unaware of this and would refuse to admit it, and since they believe that they are in fact the ones who are rationally and intellectually superior, it follows that in the process of destroying their pride and delusion, we should expose their pervasive irrationality, and demonstrate that they are intellectually inferior. In addition, since the non-Christians often accuse us of being irrational, surely they are not permitted to resist when we hold *them* to a standard of strict rationality and sound logic.

Rather than impeding progress, this approach uncovers problems as they occur, and thus it prevents false progress that might collapse later on in the conversation. Any irrationality – any false definition, unstated premise, unjustified assumption, invalid inference – left unnoticed or unchallenged in the course of debate might arise later to cause problems and confusions, and all the while the non-Christian unjustifiably retains his intellectual pride and sense of superiority. Most non-Christians have never been challenged – really challenged – about their most basic beliefs and assumptions, and they walk away from each debate thinking that, even if they have failed to refute the Christian faith, at least their own beliefs are intact.⁸

The basic skill required to apply the above principle is the ability to reconstruct and examine arguments. In other words, you must mentally rearrange everything that your opponent says into a syllogism and then examine it. Since people seldom speak in complete syllogisms, there will often be missing premises in the reconstructed syllogism. This in itself does not indicate a logical fallacy, but you ought to discover these missing premises, and then examine them.

You examine a syllogism by asking relevant questions about it: What does each word in this syllogism mean? Is each word used consistently throughout, or does it commit the fallacy of equivocation? Are there any missing premises? What are they? Where do they come from? Are these missing premises true and defensible? How does my opponent know that these premises are true? How does he infer from these premises to the conclusion? Is the inference logically valid and necessary? Does this argument commit any informal fallacies?

⁸ The non-Christian might object to our approach of challenging everything about his beliefs and his statements, but this very objection is one of the things that we should challenge. Not every objection is intelligent or rational, and our position is that a non-Christian objection is always unintelligent and irrational; therefore, we challenge the unbeliever to defend all his beliefs, questions, and objections.

You might think that such a tedious procedure applies only to the major points that the opponent makes, to be performed only several times in each debate. But I insist that you must seize every opportunity – strive to take advantage of as many as humanly possible – to expose the non-Christian's foolishness, showing that he is completely unintelligent, irrational, and incompetent. Most beginning apologists know about syllogisms and fallacies, but even seasoned apologists do not subject *everything* that non-Christians say to such a meticulous logical analysis. When you do this, you will notice that *everything* that the unbeliever says is indeed mindless rubbish.

Our contention is not only that the unbelievers affirm irrational conclusions, but that he is pervasively irrational. He is irrational at every point in his thinking, not only at the major points, and you must bring this out to demonstrate his pervasive irrationality. Besides, it is often the seemingly minor points that lead to the major ones, and if you will challenge him on the minor points, he will never get the chance to build up to the major ones in the first place, that is, unless you allow him to continue for the sake of argument.

The more skilled that you become in reconstructing and examining arguments, the more natural, accurate, and thorough you will become in performing the analysis. At first, your mind might not be quick enough to capture all of your opponent's statements and arguments, but when this way of thinking becomes an intellectual reflex or habit, you will be able to reconstruct and examine everything uttered during the course of a debate or discussion as it happens.

This is how we should always operate when discussing and defending the Christian faith. Every statement is immediately and instinctively rearranged into syllogistic form, and all the words, definitions, premises, assumptions, and inferences are examined. And this also applies to how we speak and write, so that we are always aware of our premises, inferences, and conclusions. Of course, it is impossible to always state all our premises or make all our inferences explicit, but we must be aware of them, and we ought to know how to defend them if called upon to do so.

Logical thinking – and in this context, we are especially referring to constant and proficient syllogistic thinking – is invaluable to both defense and offense in apologetics. Although we may not have achieved perfect rationality, to the extent that we have patterned our thinking after God's perfect rationality, our thinking is precise and correct, and even our imperfect reflection of God's perfect rationality makes us invincible in debate, because even the foolishness of God is greater than the wisdom of man. The Bible itself uses syllogistic thinking in many places. This is because the syllogism is God's idea. Whether we are doing it explicitly or implicitly, when we think syllogistically using premises supplied by biblical propositions, we have the mind of Christ.

When you learn to think this way – syllogistically and rationally – you will notice that the non-Christians are extremely incompetent in formulating their questions and objections, and that in every instance, they do not really know what they are asking at all. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that none of their statements can be logically understood.

Let me give you an example. One of the most popular objections against the Christian faith is the so-called "problem of evil." The non-Christian might say, "If God is all-powerful and all-loving, then why is there so much evil in this world?" Most Christians assume that the objection is intelligible, that they know what the unbeliever means by this, and that the unbeliever means by it what they think he means by it, and then they proceed to answer the objection. But do we really know what the non-Christian means? Does *he* know what he means?

As it stands, this is not even an objection, but a question. Yes, the objection is implied, but what is it? For something to be an *objection* against the Christian faith, it must be an argument reducible to a syllogism with a conclusion that contradicts the Christian faith. That is, it must contain true premises and necessarily lead to a conclusion like, "Therefore, the Christian religion is false," or "Therefore, the Christian God does not exist." In this case, what exactly is the objection? What are these true premises? What is the precise process of reasoning that necessarily leads to the conclusion that the Christian faith is false or that God does not exist?

You should not assume the answers to these questions as if the non-Christian has stated them. Instead of guessing what he means, and instead of doing the work for him, make him do his own work. Demand that he makes his argument explicit and complete, asking him the relevant questions every step of the way. As with every objection that non-Christians make, when you perform this analysis and challenge, you will find that the problem of evil cannot be logically formulated. And if it cannot be logically formulated, then there is no objection for you to answer.

We are not avoiding the objection, because the non-Christian cannot rationally insist that there is an objection in the first place, when he himself does not know what he is asking, and when we have no rational way of understanding the challenge. The non-Christian boasts so much about his rationality, so he has no right to whine when rational analysis crushes his objection.

Still, the Bible does explain the existence of evil, and if we will pretend that the question can be formulated, it indeed explains how the existence of God is consistent with the existence of evil. So I have conclusively answered the objection in a number of places.⁹ Here the point is that we must never uncritically accept the non-Christian's challenge as intelligible or meaningful when it is complete gibberish. He thinks that his objection makes sense, that it is logically formulated and rationally forceful, and this reinforces his pride in his intellectual capabilities. As mentioned, in apologetics we must not only defend ourselves against the challenges that arise from this intellectual pride, but we must attack the pride itself. We must not only defend and present the wisdom of God, but we must also expose and destroy the pride of man, showing that the non-Christian is in fact an extremely stupid person.

Another way the non-Christian raises the objection is to mention specific events that he considers problematic for or irreconcilable with biblical teachings. For example, there is

⁹ For a detailed answer to the problem of evil, see Vincent Cheung, "The Problem of Evil."

the question, "Where was God on September 11th?"¹⁰ Many Christians assume that this question makes sense, that they know what the unbeliever means, and then they proceed to answer it. Now, although I understand that we often use "shorthand" in our everyday speech, I also understand what the Bible teaches about the non-Christian's stupid and futile mind, and therefore I know that he has no idea what he is asking.

In the first place, what does he mean by "where"? God is not local or physical, so it makes no sense to say that he is at one place *instead* of another. So if the non-Christian is referring to a local or physical God, then his question has nothing to do with us. How do we know that this is not what he means? We must ask him what he means. By "where," he is probably thinking about the relationship between God and the event, and specifically, whether God causes or allows evil and tragic events, and if so, how this is consistent with what Scripture teaches about God. This might be what he means, but you should not guide him like this outright. The non-Christian thinks that he is intelligent and rational, so you should take every opportunity to show him that he is not – that he cannot properly formulate a question is one indication that he is in fact stupid and irrational.

But then, if he proceeds to ask how the Bible's teaching on God is consistent with the existence of evil, the question is still incomplete, because there is still no clear indication of any contradiction to be resolved. He has to include a premise asserting that the existence of God contradicts the existence of evil, and then he must say that since there is evil, the conclusion is that there is no God. But where does this premise come from? How does he know it? How does he know that it is true? Also, what does he mean by evil? Where does his definition come from? If his definition of God comes from inside the Bible, but his definition of evil comes from outside the Bible, then what does the objection have to do with us? If his definitions of both God and evil come from the Bible, then do God and evil *as defined by the Bible* contradict each other? The non-Christian must show it.

You must force the non-Christian to take responsibility for his objection. If he makes the objection, then he must stand behind it. Make him state all the premises in his objection explicitly; make him show that the premises are true, and that the conclusion necessarily follows from the premises. If he cannot do this, then this shows that either he did not consider these issues before he used the objection against you, or he knew that he could not resolve them and used it against you anyway. This means that he is a fraud, an intellectual charlatan, because his objection is a trick and carries no substance. It makes him a hypocrite, because he accuses you of being irrational, but he cannot even properly state a simple objection. The non-Christian takes pride in his intelligence; therefore, you must attack his intelligence, and demonstrate that he is very stupid, and that he can do nothing right in debate.

Another example comes from the debate about homosexual marriage. Those who support homosexual marriage often say, "How does homosexual marriage hurt your marriage? How does it affect you?" The assumption is that homosexual marriage is wrong only if it hurts someone else. But where does this assumption come from? It requires a previous

¹⁰ I am referring to the terrorist attacks against the United States that happened on September 11, 2001. We can illustrate the same point with a question like, "Where was God when that woman was raped?"

argument to establish; that is, there must be an argument with true premises that necessarily lead to the conclusion, "Therefore, homosexual marriage is wrong only if it hurts someone else." But as it stands, the question has no more logical force than, "What does homosexual marriage have to do with a ham sandwich?" Well, maybe nothing, but so what?¹¹

Many Christians tend to answer incomplete and irrational objections too soon (and objections against the Christian faith are always incomplete and irrational). In this case, they would immediately try to show that homosexual marriage indeed damages others, or they might affirm that homosexual marriage is wrong on another basis than that it hurts others. Either way, this allows the non-Christian to escape harsh scolding and humiliation regarding this careless and irrational objection, and he sees no reason to discontinue his madness. Instead of permitting this, we must intellectually seize him by the throat and choke all the life out of his belief system.

Sometimes a non-Christian might say something like, "Evolution has refuted Christianity," and then he would just stand there, smiling stupidly but triumphantly, waiting for your response. It is true that on the surface some unbelievers state their view with more precision, but the substance of what they say is never any better. As it stands, the statement is an unjustified assertion, not an argument. This does not mean that a deficient statement is always false, but it means that it would be unwise to answer it immediately, since then we would miss an opportunity to challenge the non-Christian's intelligence and his very way of thinking. For this to become a rational objection against the Christian faith, the unbeliever must show his reasoning, and establish his beliefs and assumptions. What is science? Can science know or prove anything at all?¹² Has science established evolution? Is evolution really true? And how exactly does evolution refute the Christian faith? The non-Christian must address every point before his statement carries any force.

How about the objection that Christianity is too "close-minded"? Again, many believers immediately scramble to explain how Christianity is in fact not close-minded. But this reaction assumes that the non-Christian's way of thinking is basically correct, and that he has only misunderstood some aspects of the Christian faith. That is, this approach allows the non-Christian to believe that his standard of judgment is indeed correct, that what is close-minded (or what seems close-minded to him) is also false and immoral, and thus to defend the Christian faith, we should show that it is not close-minded.

The proposition, "Christianity is too close-minded," indeed implies an objection. But what is the objection? And what is the reasoning behind it? The non-Christian must do several things before this become an actual objection. First, he needs to establish by argument that what is close-minded is also false or immoral, or somehow unacceptable. Second, he needs to establish that the Christian faith is close-minded. Then, he needs to demonstrate that these two premises logically and inevitably lead to the conclusion that the Christian faith is false or immoral, or somehow unacceptable. In addition, as he does all this he must clearly define all the words and expressions, and he must establish all his premises with sound arguments.

¹¹ See Vincent Cheung, "Homosexuality and the Wrath of God."

¹² See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, and Captive to Reason*.

If we were to examine everything in these examples, as we should when debating unbelievers and heretics, there are many other points that we could raise about them. To illustrate, with homosexual marriage, we may ask what the non-Christian means by "marriage," and ask him why we must accept his definition. Moreover, when he claims that homosexual marriage does not hurt or affect other people, we may ask what he means by "hurting" or "affecting" someone. If homosexual marriage annoys me or angers me, or if it is so disgusts me that the mere idea of it ruins my appetite, does this not show that it hurts me or affects me? Does this count against homosexual marriage? Why not? Or does he have some other kind of damage in mind? How can he claim that homosexual marriage does not hurt me, and then exercise an exclusive right to choose what counts as damage? He must define and defend his standard, and of course, we will also criticize his definition and defense until he has no place to stand.

Unless he is able to establish that he has the exclusive right to define what it means to hurt or affect someone, and that he has the exclusive right to impose this definition upon the rest of humanity – that is, he needs to prove that he is God over all of creation – then this argument for homosexual marriage implies that anyone can use the same kind of reasoning to justify violence against homosexuals as long as he defines damage in a way that excludes the injuries or deaths that he intends to inflict, and he gets to impose this definition of damage on the homosexuals. As Christians, we are against the use of violence by the church in spreading and enforcing our beliefs,¹³ but we can forbid it only if we reject the homosexual's argument, since his own reasoning offers unrestricted permission for anyone to "hurt" and "affect" them in any way he pleases as long as he provides his own definitions of these terms to accommodate his purpose.

We should not become stuck in looking at examples. You must learn the way of thinking that we have been discussing, and not just how to answer particular questions and objections¹⁴ – besides, I have answered many of them in my other writings, and you can look to them for additional examples.

The following is a fictitious dialogue between Vincent, Nathan, and Sam. It is only a teaching tool – it does not represent exactly what a non-Christian might say under a similar context, neither does it demonstrate all that the Christian should say. The dialogue is not intended to resolve the topics brought up – this is done in various places in my writings. Right now the purpose is to illustrate a certain way of thinking, a biblical mindset that can adapt to any debate situation, and that is not reduced to rehearsed answers and arguments.

Nathan: Vincent! Do you remember me? We met at Tommy's wedding last year. How are you doing?

Vincent: I am well, thank you. Yes, of course I remember you.

¹³ The state ought to use violence, including the death penalty, to enforce God's judgment against criminals, such as murderers.

¹⁴ See Vincent Cheung, "Students in the Real World."

N: This is Sam, my brother.

V: Hi, Sam.

Sam: Hello.

N: What are you reading?

V: I am reading William Shedd's *Dogmatic Theology*.

N: Is that a Christian book?

V: Yes, it's a book on Christian doctrines.

N: I can never be a Christian.

V: Oh, you think so? Why is that?

N: Well, I don't want to offend you, but I think that Christianity is too irrational, and I just can't accept it.

V: If you have some time to talk, in a moment we can find out just what you know about the Christian faith. But for now, what do you believe? How do you decide what is true and what is false? How do you view reality? If you refuse to accept what you consider as irrational, have you found something rational that you can believe?

N: Yes, I believe that science is a rational and reliable way to discover true information about reality, and therefore I believe in science.

V: Let me see if I understand. You said that you are willing to believe only that which is rational, and science is rational, while the Christian faith is not; therefore, you believe in science.

N: Yes, that is what I mean.

V: But what is rationality? And what is science?

N: What do you mean?

V: You said that you will only believe in what is rational, and science is rational. If I am going to interact with your view, I must understand what you mean by rationality, what you mean by science, and why you think that science is rational.

N: I haven't thought much about this before, but your question is not difficult to answer. A rational belief is a belief that is based on sound evidence and reality, on facts and a verification of facts. Science is a way of interacting with the world that takes these things into account. For example, science employs experimentation to test its hypotheses.

V: Your response shows that you are more careful than most non-Christians, but it is not nearly enough.

N: How so?

V: There are still too many unanswered questions. What is evidence? What is reality? What is a fact? How did you arrive at your definitions for these terms, and why must I accept them? Even if you can define a fact and impose that definition on me, how do you come to know a fact? If you perceive a fact by your sensations, then how do you prove that your sensations are reliable? You tell me that science involves experimentation, but why is experimentation a rational way of discovering true information about reality? What is the precise line of reasoning in experimentation, and how do you answer the charge that it depends on induction, which never arrives at logically necessary conclusions, and that it commits the fallacy of asserting the consequent? Then, when you say that you believe in science and in experimentation, do you mean that you use the scientific method yourself to discover all that you think you know about reality – every little detail that you claim to be scientifically established? Or, do you believe what scientists tell you that they have discovered by the scientific method? In that case, are you really believing in science, or in the testimony of people who claim to be scientists? On what basis do you believe in their testimony?

N: So many questions!

V: I am already keeping this brief. As a non-Christian, your thinking is so deficient and defective that I can spend many hours challenging you on every phrase that you utter, and you will never be able to successfully answer even one of the thousands of attacks that I throw at you. Nevertheless, I am not asking these questions just for the sake of asking them, nor am I trying to distract you with irrelevant questions; rather, you claimed to be rational, and now you must back up your claim with a rational defense. But I am not done. I suppose you would agree that rationality has to do with logic and valid reasoning, and by saying that Christianity is irrational, you also

mean that Christianity is illogical and that it involves invalid reasoning. Is that an accurate way of putting it?

N: Yes, I suppose, but what you are getting at?

V: If you claim to be rational, then I ask that you *really* be rational. That is, I demand that you reason in a valid manner, following the strict laws of logic.

N: I have no problem with that. I think that this is what science does.

V: You still have not answered my previous questions, so you already have a problem. You have not provided a rational defense of science. But since you think that science is so rational, then tell me *one* rational conclusion that science has produced. You can choose from anything in all the history of science. Before you reply, note that a rational conclusion about reality would be a proposition about reality that has been necessarily deduced from true premises. This is simple logic. What are these true premises in your example? How did you find out about them? How do you know that they are true? Does the procedure involve deriving knowledge from sensation? If so, explain how knowledge can *rationally* come from sensation. A belief can be written out as a proposition, so write out the entire process of how a sensation rationally becomes a proposition in the mind. If science is rational, and if your belief in science is so rational, then surely you can answer me. Then, continue to show me how you derived the true premises that necessarily lead to the conclusion in your scientific belief. I promise you that whatever scientific theory, belief, or conclusion that you present to me, I will be able to refute it in a matter of seconds, in many cases under ten seconds, or even five.

N: Hold on. Are you telling me that you doubt the rationality of science?

V: I not only doubt it, but when I am done with you I will have demonstrated that science is the most irrational and superstitious thing that the world has ever known.

(Later in the conversation...)

N: Now that we have moved on to talk about the nature of God, I have an objection that no Christian I have talked to seems to have a rational answer for. Sometimes they throw in a bunch of theological words, and then finally say that it's all a mystery. Instead of

vindicating Christianity, what they say only reinforces my belief that this religion is irrational. Maybe you can answer it?

V: It sounds like a difficult question, but try me.

N: All right. If God is absolutely sovereign as the Christian faith teaches, then that would make him the author of sin.

V: So what?

N: So what?! You don't see the problem? Whenever I said this to a Christian, he would scramble to deny it, and then he would give me some contorted explanation that contradicted what he just told me about the nature of God.

V: Well, I would be happy to respond if you can tell me what the problem is.

N: I am surprised that you don't see it. If God is sovereign, then that would make him the author of sin, but if God is the author of sin, then that would contradict what the Bible teaches about him.

V: Really? How? Let me remind you that I have not said whether or not God is the author of sin. At this point, you haven't even stated the problem. How do you establish the premise, "God cannot be the author of sin"? And what exactly in the Bible would this contradict? Point to the exact passage and prove to me that your interpretation of it is correct.

N: Well, I think there is something in the Letter of James...

V: Is there? *Is there?* Do you even know what you are talking about? So you would make an allegation about my religion without having a solid intellectual basis for it. And you call Christians irrational? But in a moment I will take you to that passage in James and let's see how you do.

N: But in any case, if God is the author of sin, that would make him unrighteous!

V: How? Tell me! What is righteousness and unrighteousness? By the way, what is the meaning of "author"? And what is the meaning of "sin" in your challenge? If the definitions for these terms do not come from the Bible, then your objection has nothing to do with me, since you are claiming there is an *internal* problem with the Christian faith. But if the definitions come from the Bible, then you

must demonstrate that assuming *the Bible's* definitions of "God," "author," "sin," "unrighteous," and such terms, then if "God" were to "author" "sin," he would be "unrighteous."

N: I have not considered these details before.

V: You claim to be rational, so why do I have to explain your own objection to you? But you need to address these details. Let me tell you what you must do to make this an actual and intelligible objection. You must establish coherent and relevant definitions for all the words and expressions involved, such as "God," "sovereign," "author," and "sin." By relevant, I mean that if you are alleging an *internal* contradiction, then you must use definitions that are internal to the worldview. You must establish the premise that for God to be sovereign would make him the author of sin. Then, you must establish the premise that there is something wrong with God being the author of sin, for example, that it would contradict a certain biblical doctrine, and you must show that you have correctly inferred and understood this doctrine. You must provide a valid argument for each of your definitions, assumptions, and premises in order to establish them. If you fail to do any of this, then there is logically no objection for me to answer. I warn you that I will fight you every step of the way as you try. But since you have never considered these necessary questions before you made the objection, this means that you are not nearly as rational as you thought, and when you said that the Christian faith is irrational, you exposed yourself as a hypocrite.¹⁵

(Later in the conversation...)

Sam: You see, Nathan, this is what I have been telling you all along. It is futile to argue with him and let logic decide the issue.

V: So you don't believe in logic?

S: No, I don't believe in logic.

V: Great, so that means you do believe in logic.

S: What are you saying? I just told you that I don't.

V: What? Your mother is a cow? What makes you say a thing like that?

¹⁵ For additional remarks on the "author of sin" issue, see Vincent Cheung, *The Author of Sin and Commentary on Ephesians*.

S: I did not say that, my mother is not a cow.

V: What? Your father is a criminal and your sister is a whore? Hey, I don't need to know all that.

S: Stop insulting my family!

V: I am not insulting your family, you are.

S: You are not making any sense!

V: Am I supposed to make sense? Logic affirms that A cannot be non-A at the same time and in the same sense. Since you don't believe in logic, then "I don't believe in logic" can just as easily mean "I *do* believe in logic," "My mother is a cow," "My father is a criminal," or "My sister is a whore." So do you believe in logic or not? If you do believe in logic, then you must succeed where Nathan failed; if you don't believe in logic, then you do believe in logic – and your mother is a cow.

The non-Christian's objection cannot be logically understood and then answered unless we first know its meaning and reasoning, but when we press for definitions and clarifications, the objection itself is destroyed. This happens with every non-Christian objection, so that logically speaking, the non-Christian really cannot ask us anything, or challenge us about anything. He thinks he is smarter, but he cannot even formulate an intelligible question or objection. He is the fool, the idiot, and this is what biblical apologetics shows – that the non-Christian is a complete buffoon.

Of course, this does not mean that we should never defend our own beliefs. In fact, as we will discuss in the next chapter, we should present and defend Christian beliefs as thoroughly as we destroy non-Christian beliefs. So it is not that we adopt a strategy of evasion – we march fiercely toward the non-Christians in our intellectual battles; rather, the problem is that none of their questions and objections makes any sense. They do not rationally understand and present their questions and objections; instead, they blindly point and shoot, and if they miss, they shoot again, and again, and again. They can often take this approach because the Christians never make them defend their own beliefs and the rational basis for their questions and objections.

Therefore, besides defending the truth of the Christian faith, we must also expose the fact that all non-Christian thinking is careless, foolish, irrational, and unjustified. For example, when it comes to the problem of evil, of course we should tell our opponents what the Bible teaches about God's relationship with evil, but we do this not because the logic of their objection demands it (since the objection makes no sense), but because God has called us to preach the gospel and teach all nations.

The non-Christian does not know or admit that everything he says is foolish and irrational; instead, he believes that he is thoroughly intelligent and rational. You must destroy this self-deception by attacking everything that he says and believes. To do this, you must learn to listen carefully and then to think logically, even syllogistically, keeping track of as many problems as you are mentally capable. Then, launch an all-out assault. Ask "Why?" Ask "So what?" Ask "How do you know?" Challenge every definition. Require every assumed premise to be explicitly stated and defended. Question every inference concerning its logical validity and necessity. Expose every irrational move, every leap in logic.

If the non-Christian's worldview is truly rational, then he should be able to answer us and to defend himself; in fact, he should have already performed the same rational analysis when he adopted his current beliefs. Since God has rendered all non-Christian thinking foolish and futile, every non-Christian will fall under rational pressure, for the Reason of God is against him, and he has no defense against our attacks.

The Christian has divine weapons from God to defeat any non-Christian in debate, but to effectively wield them and to accomplish his mission, he must be willing, decisive, precise, and thorough. Instead of regarding apologetics as only defense, as only answering questions and making clarifications, he must endlessly attack all non-Christian thinking with the overwhelming force of Christ the Logic (*logos*, John 1:1).

3. ARRANGE THE CLASH

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out 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 some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."¹⁶ (Acts 17:22-31)

The Bible says that God has made human wisdom foolish and futile; it is "in the wisdom of God" that "the world through *its* wisdom did not know him" (1 Corinthians 1:21). In other words, it is by God's deliberate design and decree that human wisdom will never attain knowledge of the most basic truth about reality (God) and that it will never attain salvation on its own. Since all of reality is inseparably connected to and sustained by God, and since every man who is without Jesus Christ will suffer endless torment in hell, this means that every non-Christian worldview, philosophy, or religion can never attain any knowledge about reality, and it can never produce any meaning, purpose, or result in life.

Thus we say that God has made human wisdom both foolish and futile. And since every non-Christian, by the very fact that he is a non-Christian, embraces and trusts in human wisdom, this means that every non-Christian is foolish and futile. Unless God sovereignly converts them, all non-Christians are stupid and useless. As the Bible declares, "All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Romans 3:12).

¹⁶ For an exposition of this passage and how it relates to biblical apologetics, see Vincent Cheung, *Presuppositional Confrontations*.

In principle, all Christians agree with me on this – that is, they agree with the Bible – but when I actually say it, many of them disown me. This is because they are embarrassed about God, and about what he explicitly teaches in Scripture. They either do not want me to repeat what the Bible teaches, or they want me to dilute it so much that nobody knows what I mean. But I am not ashamed of what God teaches me, and I refuse to accommodate spineless wimps who claim to be Christians.

Therefore, I will repeat: All non-Christians are stupid, sinful, and worthless, as the Bible teaches. Even as Christians, all our wisdom, holiness, and worth come from God, and not from ourselves, so that without him, we are nothing and can do nothing (John 15:5). I stress this not just for the sake of insulting non-Christians, and not just because it makes me happy to say it; rather, I am telling you about the reality of the situation, a reality that carries important implications for apologetics. We have discussed one of these implications earlier, namely, because human wisdom is foolish and futile, as long as we depend on divine wisdom in our apologetics, we will always overcome the non-Christian in debate.

Another important implication is that, since human wisdom is foolish and futile, since it is absurd and barren, we must not begin with human wisdom and then build upon it in the attempt to produce knowledge about reality or intellectual fruit. Therefore, unlike those who embrace defective methods of apologetics, the biblical apologist does not try to redirect human wisdom to a conclusion that concurs with divine wisdom; instead, he arranges an all-out clash between human wisdom and divine wisdom. And as a result, he vindicates divine wisdom and crushes human wisdom with it.

This is the essence of my method: I cut down human pride and lift up divine wisdom, and I crush human speculation by divine revelation. And unlike what some apologists suggest, I am not saying that I would set the two opposing viewpoints next to each other and let people choose which one is more "attractive." I am not advocating comparative apologetics, but confrontational apologetics.

Although comparative apologetics has its purpose and can assume its place as a minor tactic within a broader strategy, only confrontational apologetics can truly vindicate the faith and crush the opponent in debate. Showing that two worldviews are different does not demonstrate that one is true and the other false. Perhaps both are rubbish. In any case, the reprobates will always be more attracted to the non-biblical worldview (1 Corinthians 1:18, 22-23), or that which is intellectually and ethically inferior, because they are stupid and sinful. If a worldview is characterized by undeniable truth and logical necessity, then in a debate about truth it is irrelevant if someone finds it unattractive. And if a worldview is demonstrably false, then to find it attractive is just a sign of inferior intelligence and character. There is very little force in comparative apologetics.

Instead of merely comparing worldviews, I am saying that the biblical worldview consists of a set of revealed doctrines that provide, first, a comprehensive philosophy that is true and coherent, so that it is logically defensible, and second, a way of thinking that intellectually obliterates the opponent, or anyone who is not in complete agreement with

it. The way to victory is to skillfully apply the biblical worldview to the intellectual challenges and opportunities that arise during the debate.

The method is to confront human wisdom with divine wisdom, and since even the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of man, I will never suffer defeat in debate, but I will always seize a complete and decisive victory. You will also possess this assurance if you will learn how to arrange, maintain, and pursue a clash between human wisdom and divine wisdom. In this chapter, we will discuss some principles and guidelines on how to make such a clash happen.

The biblical approach to apologetics is to confront human wisdom with divine wisdom, to crush human wisdom and vindicate divine wisdom. You do this by arranging a clash between the biblical worldview and the non-biblical worldview. This in turn means that during your debate with the non-Christian, you must present at least the major elements of the biblical worldview, and you must interact with the major elements of your opponent's non-biblical worldview.

If you are successful, several things will happen. It will become evident that the two worldviews contradict each other at every major point. If the first principles of two worldviews oppose each other, then everything that is deduced from these opposing principles will necessarily oppose each other also. Since you know that the first principles of your worldview oppose the first principles of your opponent's worldview,¹⁷ this means that you will also logically disagree with your opponent on even every minor issue. Even when you appear to agree with your opponent on something, it will be a superficial agreement, and an agreement that would immediately break down when each side clarifies what he truly means and present the reasons for his position.

Since the two worldviews oppose each other at every point, it follows that each worldview must stand on its own intellectual merits and resources. In other words, each one may contain only propositions that are validly deduced from self-authenticating first principles; it may not borrow propositions available in another worldview that is not deducible from its own first principles.

To illustrate, if a non-biblical principle cannot rationally stand on its own, and then by valid deduction produce an ethical principle against murder, then an adherent of this worldview cannot rationally affirm an ethical principle against murder. Better yet, if a non-biblical principle cannot rationally stand on its own, and then by valid deduction produce a theory of knowledge, then an adherent of this worldview cannot rationally claim to know anything at all. And if an adherent of this non-biblical worldview cannot rationally claim to know anything at all, then it follows that he has no intellectual basis or resource by which to question or attack Christianity.

¹⁷ If the first principles of your worldview and your opponent's worldview in fact agree, then this means that either you are really a non-Christian like your opponent, or your opponent is really a Christian like you, and that the whole debate is a big misunderstanding.

Of course, the implication is that to be able to rationally question or attack anything, one must already have a true and coherent worldview. If the person cannot defend his own worldview at the same time that he is attacking another, then all his questions and objections are just the meaningless rants of a lunatic. Your non-Christian opponent is precisely this – a ranting lunatic – and you must expose this fact in your intellectual confrontation with him.

On the other hand, this also means that when you construct your own worldview and formulate your own arguments, you must not borrow non-biblical principles. There is no need to do this anyway, since biblical principles are sufficient to sustain a true, comprehensive, and coherent worldview. In fact, since the biblical worldview is the only true view of reality, to mix non-biblical principles into it would only generate confusion and weaken your arguments.

For example, you will only introduce inconsistencies into your worldview if you hold to empiricism – the reliability of sensations or that knowledge can come from sensations – in any sense or to any degree. Likewise, because such inventions as free will, compatibilism, passive decree, secondary causes, and Arminianism are unbiblical, to affirm any of these would generate irresolvable difficulties in your worldview that your opponent might discover and attack. Someone who does not know the true biblical doctrines would then reassure himself that there are indeed inconsistencies in the Christian faith, when all he has found in you is a heretic, so that you deserve to be refuted and humiliated.

In any case, by showing that the two worldviews contradict each other at every point, you also show that they cannot coexist. Since the biblical worldview and the non-biblical worldview contradict each other, it also means that they cannot both be true, but if one is true, then the other must be false. This in turn means that when you are defending the Christian worldview, you are at the same time also attacking the non-Christian worldview, and when you are attacking the non-Christian worldview, you are also defending the Christian worldview.¹⁸

This insight is important not only in winning the debate, but also in starting and sustaining the debate, that is, in stirring up intellectual conflict (remember, we want the worldviews to clash). As a simple example, someone might say to you, "I believe that all religions are good, and that all of them are true, only that they describe things from different perspectives." On the surface, this statement seems to affirm that Christianity is also good and true; however, since Christianity affirms that it is the *only* good and true worldview, this person's statement contradicts Christianity and is therefore actually an attack against Christianity. On the other hand, as you then present and defend the exclusivity of Christianity, you are logically also attacking this person's statement, which is a part of his worldview.

¹⁸ We can view the situation this way because we already know that the biblical worldview is true, and this fact is fixed in our minds when we discuss apologetics. Otherwise, two worldviews that contradict each other can both be false, as when two non-biblical worldviews clash, and when examined by our rational method, they would both be destroyed.

This must be our reaction when the non-Christian, without abandoning his beliefs, says or implies, "You are *also* right." The Christian can never be satisfied with anything less than the admission, "I am wrong, you are right – Christianity is true, and all non-Christian worldviews, philosophies, and religions are false." To say that Christianity is *also* right is the logical equivalent of saying that Christianity is wrong, since Christianity itself claims to be exclusively true. Therefore, even from what seems to be innocent and complimentary (although it does not seem this way to me), the biblical apologist can ignite the clash between the Christian worldview and the opponent's non-Christian worldview.

By presenting the entire biblical worldview during the course of debate, and by interacting with the opponent's entire non-biblical worldview, you force each worldview to stand on its own, exposing all of its strengths, weaknesses, dependencies, and internal and external relationships. You will then not only show that the non-Christian is wrong on a specific claim about a narrow issue (so that the rest of his worldview remains intact), but you will show that he is fundamentally and comprehensively wrong on *everything*, and that insofar as your beliefs have been derived from biblical teachings, you are fundamentally and comprehensively right on *everything*.

You will vindicate the Christian faith as a worldview, as a complete belief system, only if you present and defend it as a worldview, and you will demolish your opponent's worldview only if you attack it as a worldview. The more comprehensive the clash, the more decisive your victory, and the more complete his destruction.

In formal debate, a significant part of the clash would be meticulously planned. Although there would be some unscripted interactions and occasional surprises, it remains that the format permits and demands much prior preparation, and that certain portions of the presentation from each side are quite fixed. Each person is allotted a set amount of time to present his arguments and refutations without interruption. This alone makes formal debate very different from informal debate.

To illustrate, in a formal debate, it is not possible to immediately challenge a false premise that the opponent uses in his argument, but you must wait your turn. Meanwhile, he is allowed to weave this false premise into his overall presentation, and if it sounds convincing to the audience, then he has gained a psychological advantage with the people. After this, even a pointed refutation of that false premise might not fully overcome the audience's favorable disposition toward your opponent, because he has been permitted to state a conclusion, however irrational, that is attractive to the people. Of course, this acknowledges the fact that members in an audience are often easily swayed by non-Christian sophistry.

As an attempt to counteract this effect, the Christian should directly describe the errors in the opponent's argument, and to explicitly state the implications for being moved by it, namely, that to favor the opponent would betray a lack of intelligence and character. In other words, depending on the context and the purpose of the formal debate, it might be appropriate to rebuke and insult the audience for being persuaded by the non-Christian view. Insult the people for being so stupid and gullible. Rebuke them for their lack of

integrity. This might not win points with them or with the judges, but we should not be there to win a contest for ourselves, but to win an intellectual confrontation for the honor of Jesus Christ.

In any case, since formal debates are prearranged, each side knows who their opponent would be as well as the precise propositions to be debated. And this means that not only does each side possess ample time to prepare his own case in advance, but he can also research his opponent's beliefs and arguments, and prepare his refutation in advance.

On the other hand, informal debate – debate that has no rules of conduct, no time limitation, no judge or moderator, etc., as in two or more people disputing about religion over dinner – is more fluid, less structured, and thus often a little chaotic. Although some aspects of it can be planned and anticipated, many aspects of an informal debate are less predictable. For example, although you may prepare a short presentation of your worldview to be used whenever an informal debate occurs, or to be used for a specific informal debate that you expect to occur, there is no guarantee that you will be permitted to give your entire presentation without interruption from your opponent, or even from the bystanders.

In fact, in an informal setting, interested bystanders might become active participants, in which case you might have to engage multiple opponents at the same time. Of course, some bystanders might wish to take your side, but when that happens they are more likely to become a distraction and hindrance. Even a beginning biblical apologist should easily defeat multiple non-Christians at the same time, in fact, even all the non-Christians in the history of humankind combined. Thus if he cannot partner with other biblical apologists, it is better for him to work alone. And even if he has an opportunity to partner with others, it might still be simpler to work alone. If he has been trained in the basics, he should not need any assistance at all. In any case, such an issue is less likely to arise in formal debate.

Using an earlier example, we note another difference when the opponent utters a false premise in the process of stating his case. Since personal conversations often consist of short turns by each side instead of extended discourses, it is possible to immediately challenge the opponent when he attempts to use a false or unjustified premise. Thus upon hearing a questionable premise, it is possible to respond, "I would like to hear your entire argument, but before you continue, how do you know what you just said is true? It seems to be a crucial premise to your argument, but I disagree with it, and if it is false, then your conclusion cannot be true, so please provide me with some rational justification for this premise."

In fact, logically speaking, in an informal debate you can prevent your opponent from making any progress at all unless he rationally establishes the premises necessary for his argument. Now he brings out additional premises and arguments as he attempts to justify the premises to his initial argument – just so he can earn the right to state the argument. But recall that the non-Christian is wrong about *everything*, so that anything he says can be refuted. And so the Christian proceeds to attack these new but logically prior premises and arguments, and in this manner forces the non-Christian to *regress* into his first principles and then into intellectual oblivion.

As an alternative, you can register your disagreement with the opponent's false premise and still allow him to finish his presentation. Socially speaking, this may be a matter of courtesy, but since he has not earned the rational right to proceed, this is optional and unimportant. Strategically speaking, this will produce a larger target for you to attack – the more he talks, the more evidence you can gather to document his ridiculous beliefs and irrational thinking. You can kill the argument at the start, or you can either compel regress or allow progress in order to let him exhibit more of his foolishness so that you can blow up the whole thing. If you can logically stop him anywhere, it means that you have a choice of whether to stop him at any particular point, for any social or strategic reason.

Of course, your opponent might also challenge your premises while you present your worldview. This might temporarily redirect the conversation, since then it might be appropriate to first defend the premise before you finish the argument. But remember that since every statement from a non-Christian is foolish and irrational, you should also take every question or objection as a springboard for a renewed attack against his intelligence and his beliefs. Make every challenge from him backfire against him. Again and again, make even the smallest objection from him result in the total destruction of his worldview and his confidence.

In addition, in an informal debate, although it is often possible to prepare a general refutation of your opponent's beliefs, a precise refutation is often impossible. Each unbeliever's exact beliefs are unique. The fact that all non-Christians are foolish and irrational makes their beliefs that much more arbitrary, and that many of them are without a public and formal creed makes their beliefs that much more diverse. Even those with such creeds do not necessarily adhere to them. This problem is more pronounced if the opponent is a stranger who affirms specific and peculiar beliefs, or if he himself is not clear on what he believes, as is often the case. In a formal debate, it is often possible to prepare a relatively precise refutation beforehand, especially if you have access to the opponent's published writings, or if he has endorsed what others have published.

Thus some of the principles and practices valuable to performing well in one kind of debate cannot be applied to the other kind, since the two formats are so different. So a person who knows how to arrange the clash in a formal debate might not know how to do it in an informal debate, and vice versa. In any case, biblical apologetics is easily adapted to both formal and informal debate; that is, the biblical approach enables the Christian to resolve the difficulties that each format presents, and to exploit the opportunities that each format offers. Although there is much more to say about formal debate, since most people will never engage in it, and since it is not our stated subject, we will now further discuss the informal debate.

Whether in formal or informal debate, you must arrange for the clash of entire worldviews, and not only several specific and narrow ideas within the worldviews. In formal debate, time is allotted for you to use as you please, so that even if there is insufficient time to exhaustively deal with each worldview, it is possible to briefly mention the major ideas. In contrast, an informal debate is not completely controlled by either party, and you are not

given uninterrupted time to use as you please; therefore, you have to find some other way to ensure a comprehensive clash of the worldviews. This does not mean that formal debates are more suitable for dealing with entire worldviews, since many informal debates are better in that they often last longer than formal debates. Two people could debate religious matters over coffee, lunch, and dinner for many hours over a matter of weeks.

To make entire worldviews clash, you must understand and exploit the nature of worldviews. A worldview is a system of thought consisting of all the propositions that it includes, and that its adherents explicitly and implicitly affirm. Each proposition, no matter how specific or trivial, is logically preceded by the foundational propositions of the system. And since these foundational propositions logically imply all the subsidiary propositions within the system, this means that every proposition is logically related to every other proposition in the system.

As an analogy, although I did not give birth to my brother and my brother did not give birth to me, we are nevertheless related because we share the same parents. Every child has parents, and since the child's parents are also the parents of all those to whom they give birth, each child is related to all the other children of his parents. He is related to his siblings through his parents. In a similar way, every proposition within a worldview is logically related to the foundational propositions of the worldview, and to all other propositions within the worldview, through the foundational propositions of the worldview.

Now, if a subsidiary proposition logically requires a certain foundational proposition, but this foundational proposition is inconsistent with another subsidiary proposition within a person's belief system, then you have just discovered a bastard proposition, or an inconsistency in his worldview. You then have legitimate reason to challenge his rationality, or to set off a logical chain reaction that would destroy the rational justification for every proposition in his worldview.

But we are getting slightly ahead of ourselves. For now, the emphasis is that every proposition is logically related to all other propositions in a worldview. This has tremendous ramifications for informal debate. It means that no matter from which proposition within a worldview a debate begins, it is always logically possible to end up covering all the other areas within this worldview. And since every worldview must address the major issues by logical necessity, it matters little whether the debate begins from a proposition in your worldview or in your opponent's worldview. If the debate starts at all, then both parties have logically committed their entire worldviews into the conflict, and not just the proposition that started it.

Although it is most convenient to start from the foundational propositions within a worldview, most informal debates will begin from a disagreement over a subsidiary proposition. For example, a debate might begin because of disagreement about the death penalty. Debate over this issue entails discussion about evil, justice, and mercy. This in turn entails a broader discussion on ethics, which in turn necessitates discussions about

epistemology and metaphysics. Once the debate has arrived at this foundational level,¹⁹ it is easy and natural to drive the discussion over to areas like history, science, religion, education, and all other areas in a worldview.

However, to do all of this, the biblical apologist must perceive the logical connection between propositions, and then to logically, naturally, and fairly direct the debate so that it covers every major aspect of each worldview. This agenda is not something that we need to hide from our opponents, since it is not a trick. The truth and coherence of a worldview become all the more obvious when the worldview is comprehensively presented. Confident of his own intelligence and rationality, the non-Christian should have no problem with a comprehensive worldview analysis. By the same token, a false and irrational worldview will appear that much more absurd and impossible the more thoroughly it is examined. Moreover, we do not avoid the issue that started the debate, but unless the debate begins from the foundational propositions themselves, whatever started it must be discussed in the light of prior presuppositions and reasoning processes.

In other words, you are to show the opponent the blueprint of your worldview, your noetic structure, and challenge him to destroy this intellectual edifice; and you are to obtain the blueprint of his worldview, so that you may demolish all the contents and patterns of his thinking, even the foundational principles of his beliefs. This does not mean that you have to complete one phase of this project before you begin the other. In an informal debate, you will probably be performing both tasks at the same time.

Because an essential part of this procedure involves presenting your own worldview and accepting an attack on it, it is imperative that you possess an accurate, precise, and comprehensive knowledge of the biblical worldview. You must understand what Scripture teaches concerning every major theological and philosophical topic.²⁰ You must perceive all the logical relations between these biblical doctrines. You must know how to present these teachings, and how to defend them. You must understand why the biblical worldview can withstand the same questions and challenges that would destroy any non-biblical worldview.

Since this method is the biblical method, I boldly declare that it is invincible, but I do not say that you can be slothful and complacent. The approach consists of a body of knowledge and a way of thinking, and you must absorb this body of knowledge and adopt this way of thinking. Therefore, the most important thing that you can do to become a better apologist is to master systematic theology, for by it you perceive and understand the whole of Scripture as a coherent system of thought.

Again, we do not separate informal debate into a defense phase and an attack phase. This is not only because informal debates are not as rigidly organized as formal debates, but as mentioned earlier, as you continue to show how the biblical worldview contradicts the non-

¹⁹ Although I describe several steps before arriving at the foundational propositions, subsidiary propositions within a worldview are in fact such that you can always immediately drive the conversation to the foundational level.

²⁰ See Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology, Ultimate Questions, and Presuppositional Confrontations*.

biblical worldview on everything, it becomes obvious that if you are right, then your opponent is wrong. Therefore, every defense of your worldview becomes an attack on your opponent's worldview, and every attack on your opponent's worldview becomes a defense of your worldview. In addition, we have said that everything that the non-Christian says is nonsense, and this means that *every* statement that he utters to attack your worldview is itself subject to your attack.

Sometimes people ask me what they should do if the opponent tries to use the same method against us. The question implies a misunderstanding of biblical apologetics. It is not the method of engagement but the content of our worldview that ensures victory in debate. Winning by method alone would be intellectual sophistry. Our method is just a way to arrange the clash, to expose the differences, and to make obvious the reality of the situation, that the biblical worldview is true, and that the non-biblical worldview is false. Therefore, we have nothing to fear from the non-Christians. In fact, we want them to imitate our method of strict rational argumentation and syllogistic analysis. This will facilitate the presentation of each worldview, and thus the vindication of the biblical worldview, and the destruction of the non-biblical worldview.

Besides knowing your own biblical worldview, you must know your opponent's worldview, and this also requires some skill and effort. It is not as simple as saying, "Please summarize all the major areas of your worldview, and the logical relations between them." You should be able to respond to this inquiry, but most non-Christians cannot, since they have never carefully considered and formulated their beliefs. Therefore, you must usually do much of the work in understanding your opponent's worldview. You will have to ask questions, make inferences, take notes, draw graphs, listen, rephrase, clarify, and confirm.

You might assume that if the non-Christian affirms a popular worldview or one that is associated with a creed, then all you need is previous knowledge of this worldview or creed. For example, if the opponent is a Muslim, then it seems that you only need to know how to refute the Koran, and perhaps other official texts and traditions associated with this religion. Sometimes this is true, but it is often not that simple. This is because a person who claims to be a Muslim does not always believe the Koran, or he may believe only parts of it. We may wonder whether he can properly claim to be a Muslim, but since the sum of his beliefs indeed constitutes a worldview, even if he illegitimately calls it the Muslim religion, it remains that we must still discover and address his beliefs as an individual.

You do this by starting from the topic or proposition that sparked the debate, and then from there reconstruct the opponent's worldview by asking questions, considering prior premises and assumptions, and the relationships between the various propositions. You must logically crawl through his entire belief system using the logical associations and relationships between his various beliefs, assertions, and arguments. You must eventually cover all the questions that every worldview must answer, especially in the areas of metaphysics and epistemology.

Whether you are confronting an opponent who affirms a worldview that is already familiar to you or one who affirms a worldview that you have never studied or encountered before,

the basic procedure of mapping out his belief system is the same. Your ability to think syllogistically – to reconstruct every argument into a syllogism, and to place every seemingly isolated proposition within the context of a syllogism – will be as valuable here when you seek to understand your opponent, as when you wish to attack him.

Since every statement that the non-Christian says is nonsense, at any point during the conversation, you have the option and the ability to destroy human pride and exalt divine wisdom, to demolish human speculation with divine revelation. In general, you should be doing this at every point of the debate, but sometimes you may wish to wait several turns in order to get a greater understanding of what the opponent is saying, before you trample his argument into the ground. This is a matter of strategy, and your exact approach depends on the situation as well as your ability.

You should use the "take down" technique whenever there is the need, or whenever you consider it prudent to do so. Remember that the "take down" is useful not only when you wish to attack your opponent, but it can also attack the opponent's attack against you, and thus stopping his attack. In fact, it enables you to strategically freeze the debate at any point or on any issue for as long as you please or consider prudent. If your "take down" challenge is logically sound and coherently formulated, then of course it is a legitimate move in argumentation. Besides mastering systematic theology, the beginning apologist must master his "take down" skill.

It would be best if you have at least several hours to engage the opponent, but if not, you can still do much within half an hour. However, sometimes you have only several minutes to talk to someone about the Christian faith, as when you are speaking to a stranger at the airport during transit. In a case like this, you should take the time that you have to perform the "take down" several times. This challenges his thinking, shakes his intellectual pride and security, and puts him in a position where he must find actual justification for his non-biblical beliefs (which we know is impossible), or embrace another non-biblical worldview (in which case he would still lack rational justification for his beliefs), or abandon non-biblical worldviews altogether to embrace the Christian faith.

Then, you must summarize for him the biblical worldview, covering all the major aspects of systematic theology, such as Scripture, God, Christ, man, salvation, judgment, and so on. This supplies him with the intellectual materials that he must embrace if God chooses to convert him. After the conversation has ended, you should pray that the God's will be done in his life, so that if the person is indeed one of God's chosen ones, the Spirit of God would work in his thoughts and render effective what you have said. Of course, even if he is one of God's chosen ones, God may not choose to convert him at this time; rather, God might make your words effective in his heart at a later time, or use additional instruments to work in his mind before finally converting him.

In any case, you have done your duty if you have challenged the human pride of your opponent and presented the divine wisdom of Scripture. If you have done these two things, then you have preached the gospel to this person, and the gospel would be either the

fragrance of life or the smell of death to him (2 Corinthians 2:16), depending on whether God has chosen him for salvation.

Christians are often interested in learning rigid techniques and memorizing prepared responses. So they try to summarize my method into a list of steps, and they would ask, "What do I say if the non-Christian says this? And what do I say if he says that? But then, what if he says *this*?" They wish to cover every scenario by memorizing someone else's answers. Although techniques and formulas have some limited use and effect, they offer the believer a false sense of security. Then, because he lacks understanding, he chokes and crumbles before an opponent who asks a question or who makes an assertion that he has never considered, or who presents an objection that he has indeed encountered before, but this time stated in different words.²¹

In contrast, the biblical apologist finds security in the superiority of divine wisdom, not in rigid techniques and memorized formulas. He understands biblical teaching and sound reasoning, and therefore he can adapt to any opponent and any situation. His confidence is not based on second-hand answers, but on the Rock, the divine *logos*, the Wisdom and Reason of God. He is invincible in debate, because he has the mind of Christ.

²¹ See Appendix: An Attack Formula.

4. ANNOUNCE THE OUTCOME

"Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God." (John 8:43-47)

Christians who affirm the biblical worldview and apply the principles of biblical apologetics will always defeat the non-Christians. Although it seems that this ought to be the end of the matter, so that there is little else to discuss, another problem often arises, namely, the non-Christians often do not know or admit that they have lost the debate.

This often stumps budding apologists, including those who have gained some proficiency in defeating the unbelievers in argumentation. After roundly defeating an opponent, it seems evident that the debate has reached a definite conclusion in favor of the Christian faith, and that the unbeliever can produce no additional arguments or objections, but still he refuses to admit defeat.

Sometimes the non-Christian's failure to grasp what has happened does not result in an explicit refusal to admit defeat, but it may be expressed in other ways. For example, he might suggest that we "start over" with the debate, or he might backtrack and morph his worldview into another form that now appears more defensible to him, and if you then defeat this new variety, he will morph it again.

Another non-Christian might suggest that we "agree to disagree," and still another one might try to comfort himself and obscure his defeat by saying that the two of you in fact agree in your beliefs, and that the dispute occurred over a misunderstanding. Then, sometimes a non-Christian will explicitly deny that he lost, or contrary to all indications, he might even claim that he won the debate. The kind of worldview he affirms is likely to influence the tactic he uses. It is improbable that an atheist will assert that the debate was over a mere misunderstanding, but a Catholic or some other heretic might suggest this when he loses the debate.

We can list several reasons to explain why a non-Christian might react this way to crushing defeat and humiliation.

First, the non-Christian really never expected you to win, so that no matter how obviously and thoroughly you have defeated him, he will not interpret it as defeat. It simply does not occur to him that he has lost, since to him it is impossible for you to win. His delusion and

arrogance has so affected his mind that he is unable to process the idea that a lowly follower of Christ can so easily expose him as such a stupid and useless person.

Second, even when a non-Christian admits that a Christian could win the debate, he entertains this possibility with the assumption that it could be done only by using his own non-biblical principles, since he has not considered the possibility that those could be wrong, and that it is precisely those principles that the biblical apologist wishes to challenge. In his thinking, it is possible to vindicate the Christian faith only if the believer could reason more correctly with the unbeliever's basic assumptions. He considers them to be universal and does not expect you to confront those very assumptions and obliterate them by logical analysis; therefore, he is bewildered and even angry when you do, and often he will fail to realize what has occurred, or become even more delusional and sink into denial. We must keep in mind that the non-Christian is never in good psychological health.

The third reason is a broad explanation that could include the first two; that is, consistent with what we have said about the non-Christian's intellect, he is so foolish and irrational that he could not follow the progress of a simple debate. The non-Christian is a stupid beast, so that he will often fail to perceive the rational force of your arguments and the logical rigor of your refutations. What irritates the biblical apologist is when the non-Christian seems oblivious to the fact that he has been exposed as a total imbecile by what has transpired in the conversation.

Is this the best that a Christian can do? Is this the limit of biblical apologetics? At this point, many people think that they cannot go any further. The non-Christian has been defeated, but he does not know it and refuses to admit it. However, it would be premature to stop here – there is something more that you can do, or to be more precise, you can still do more of the same thing.

Although the non-Christian does not know what happened during the debate and what resulted from it, we assume that you do know what happened. That is, whereas he has failed to follow the logical progression of the arguments, refutations, and conclusions of the debate, you have been fully conscious of these things, so that you can retrace and summarize them. Since you are aware of what happened even when the non-Christian is oblivious, you can simply state that which is so obvious to you. In other words, *tell him* what happened.

A previous chapter mentioned that a Christian who learns biblical apologetics would often perform quite well until the opponent brings up a question or an objection that, for some reason, causes the believer to stop applying the principles that have been serving him so well up to that point. That is, he suddenly thinks that the method does not apply to *this* question or objection, when what he should do is to apply the method *again*. He would be attacking the non-Christian over and over, until the unbeliever mentions something that he suddenly thinks cannot be attacked, when what he should do is to attack *again*.

You must fiercely and relentlessly apply the biblical method to let it bring about what it is intended to accomplish. There is nothing wrong with the method, which is really just an application of biblical theology and sound reasoning. However, you must not go "blank" at any point, but you must maintain the pressure on the non-Christian by continuing to apply biblical theology and sound reasoning to your debate.

The fact that the non-Christian is oblivious to his defeat does not have to be your problem. It is his problem, so let him know about it. Make this another point of disagreement between you and the unbeliever. Maintain the pressure. Continue the attack. If you have defeated him in debate by biblical wisdom, then his very ignorance or denial of defeat is another "pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5). You can attack it just as you have attacked any other part of his belief system.

Assuming that you have decisively crushed your opponent, in general you can deal with his refusal to admit defeat just like any other question or objection that he presents, but there are several specific things that you can do to handle this part of the conflict.

First, you should declare victory. Whatever escape tactic he uses, you should oppose and contradict it. This maintains the clash, and makes it necessary for the opponent to defend the conclusion that he has reached about the debate. If he says, "Let's just agree to disagree," instead of accepting this, say, "No, I do not agree to disagree. In fact, we will never agree until you change your beliefs and agree with me. For me to agree with you, or to agree to disagree, would be to compromise the worldview that I have been asserting and defending."

Second, you should summarize for the non-Christian what has transpired over the course of the debate. Remind him of how the debate started, of how you successfully defended your worldview against his attacks, of how he failed to defend his worldview against your refutations, and of how the two of you finally arrived at the present point in the dialogue. Explain to him the rational basis of why you have won the debate, and remind him that the verdict is decided on such a basis of rationality, not on his feelings or expectations.

If the non-Christian boasted about his rationality and intellectual superiority, remind him of that, and show him that according to a logical analysis and summary of the debate, you have decisively defeated him. If he still denies defeat or even claims victory, then demand him to offer an analysis of the debate, to summarize every stage and every argument of the dialogue with strict deductive logic. In other words, just as you have defeated him by enforcing logic throughout the debate, now you can compel him to admit defeat by enforcing logic again.

If the non-Christian wants to "start over," claiming that you have somehow confused him, then you can point out that if he is as rational and intelligent as he claimed, then this could not have happened. Why does he need to start over if he is so intellectually superior? If he wishes to morph his worldview, you should often let him do it, just so you can defeat him again, and so that you can embarrass him by loudly drawing attention to the fact that he is backtracking and changing his views.

This becomes evidence against the claim that he is rational and intellectually superior. He is stupid, and that is why he does not know what he should believe. You should let him morph if time allows, because unless he morphs into the biblical worldview itself (in which case you no longer need to debate him), you will be able to defeat whatever he morphs into, and all his changes will become additional evidence that demonstrates his intellectual incompetence. Keep track of his changes, and then loudly point them out to him and to all bystanders.²²

Third, although you might encounter the same opponent again in a future conversation, unless what happens at this point drags both of you right back into the center of the debate, you have indeed reached the conclusion of this debate session. This is the time to make the Christian faith personal, even if you have already done so during the debate, and especially if you have not done it.

Tell him the implication of his defeat. He entered the debate thinking that he was more rational and that he was intellectually superior. However, over the course of the conversation all his non-biblical beliefs have been destroyed and shown to be absurd and irrational. Instead, the Christian faith has been vindicated, and it has been shown that all valid reasoning is patterned after the Logic and Reason of God (John 1:1). Jesus Christ is the only one who can save this man's soul and his intellect, but if he does not convert, he will remain a moron throughout the remaining portion of his worthless life, which will then end in ultimate futility and horror as God throws him into hell and tortures him there forever.

You must never give the impression that by defeating him in debate, you have destroyed a system of thought that is outside of him and apart from him. You must not allow him to think that he remains unscathed when his worldview has been utterly crushed and humiliated. Christians have done everyone a great disservice by separating the sins from the sinners and the heresies from the heretics. No, they are sinners because *they* sin, and they are heretics because *they* believe and teach heresies.

Accordingly, you must never utter some nonsense like, "You know, Pete, I don't think that you are a stupid person. In fact, I think that you are very intelligent, but you just happen to believe some stupid things." This is rubbish! No, non-Christians believe in stupid things because *they* are stupid, and that is why *they* need to change. They commit sinful acts because *they* are sinful, and that is why *they* need to repent. This is how you apply the gospel as something that *they* need: You tell them that, apart from Christ, *they* are stupid, sinful, and worthless, but those whom God saves by Christ is given wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:29).

²² If a non-Christian is especially prone to backtracking and morphing, then it might be advisable to write down some of his major premises and arguments during the debate, and on crucial points, rephrase his assertions and arguments to him and make him confirm them and commit to them. After this, his backtracking and morphing will become more obvious, and it will be easier to point them out and make them count against him.

I am not suggesting that if you will clearly state the basis for your claim to victory, then the opponent will surely break down and admit defeat. His heart is probably so hardened against truth and reason that he will defy any conclusion that does not favor his beliefs; nevertheless, it is still important to declare and explain your victory in order to make your presentation complete. This is especially important if there are other people listening to the debate. Again, many people cannot follow a rational discourse, and they might also need your help to realize that you have won. Of course, this is not to manipulate their thinking by merely asserting your victory, since you are to summarize the debate and explain to them why you have won, retracing the steps by which the debate has reached its conclusion in your favor.

CONCLUSION

This concludes our short course on apologetics in conversation. I have shared with you some of my principles for winning. Some of you will perceive their power and proceed to apply them for the glory of God, while others will be horrified by what appears to them as a harsh and ruthless approach.

Although I wish everyone would affirm that which is biblical, your approval means nothing to me. Unless there is a biblical basis for your objection to my approach, it is in itself a "pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God." Insofar as what I have written is biblical, your disagreement means defiance against God. You might find my approach offensive, but I find it much more offensive that you oppose the Bible's assessment of the non-Christian's condition and its instruction on how we ought to approach him – that he is foolish and futile, and that we should tell him about it.

Many years ago, J. Gresham Machen wrote:

Modern preachers are trying to bring men into the Church without requiring them to relinquish their pride; they are trying to help men avoid the conviction of sin. The preacher gets up into the pulpit, opens the Bible, and addresses the congregation somewhat as follows: "You people are very good," he says; "you respond to every appeal that looks toward the welfare of the community. Now we have in the Bible – especially in the life of Jesus – something so good that we believe it is good enough even for you good people." Such is modern preaching. It is heard every Sunday in thousands of pulpits.²³

Likewise, the modern apologist says, "You people are very rational; you respond to sound arguments and follow the evidence wherever it leads. Your achievements in science, literature, and all kinds of intellectual disciplines are brilliant and astounding. Now we have in the Bible something so rational that we believe it is rational enough even for you rational people." Such is modern apologetics. But as Machen continues to write in the context of preaching, "It is entirely futile."²⁴

One form of apologetics assures non-Christians that they function with admirable rationality in many areas of life, only that they require biblical presuppositions to "account for" what they do. Even more treasonous than this, the followers of this school of thought then surrender to the non-Christians and declare that the biblical presuppositions themselves can be known only by non-biblical principles. And these biblical presuppositions are then used to endorse those things that are inherently irrational, such as

²³ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1923; reprint 2001), p. 68.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

empiricism, induction, and science. So as they sing praises to science they would insist that science itself is meaningful only given biblical presuppositions. At the same time, they would religiously defend the assertion that the biblical presuppositions themselves are only known by an empirical epistemology, as in the epistemology of science.

Therefore, it seems their idea of biblical preaching would be to say that only Jesus Christ can "account for" offering praises and sacrifices to Satan, but somehow only Satan can bring you to Jesus Christ. Thus without destroying Satan, they introduce the necessity of Christ, and then they bow down to worship the devil along with the non-Christians. It is a rather obvious form of syncretism, but this is how they "defend" the faith. With much sound and fury, they claim to make the biblical worldview the foundation, but in reality they betray it to be swallowed up by the non-Christian worldview, and make Christ himself kneel to the devil. At this time this is overwhelmingly the more popular form of presuppositional apologetics. No wonder non-Christians continue in their delusion of intellectual superiority.

Just as the preachers Machen described were not gospel preachers, the apologists I described are not biblical apologists. Rather, true biblical preaching and apologetics say, whether or not in these words, "You non-Christians are stupid, sinful, hopeless, and worthless. You are unproductive, unprofitable, and ungrateful. You must repent and believe in Jesus Christ, and depend on him to save you. If you do not embrace the Christian faith, God will throw you into the fires of hell, where he will torture you with extreme and endless suffering."

There are several reasons why many people are offended and repulsed by such a message.

First, sometimes it is based on a misunderstanding. I never said that you must always be harsh and contentious when preaching the gospel or defending the faith. I never said that we should constantly repeat to the non-Christian, "You are stupid, you are sinful, you are worthless." Such words are indeed appropriate and should often be used, but whether or not we use these exact words, the thought must be clearly conveyed, or we would not be communicating to the non-Christian all that the Bible says about him. In any case, my main emphasis is on spiritual and intellectual hostility, and this kind of hostility does not imply a constant outward social hostility. Still, contrary to many people, I would insist that there is a place for this latter kind of hostility, as demonstrated and commanded by Christ, the prophets, and the apostles, and for those who respect them, also by the Reformers.

Second, many of those who claim to be Christians are offended and repulsed because they are in fact non-Christians. They have never been converted, and have never committed themselves to the teachings of the Christian faith, so of course a true expression of the gospel produces this reaction in them. As Peter writes, "Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,' and, 'A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.' They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for" (1 Peter 2:7-8).

Third, even some genuine Christians are offended and repulsed by this message, especially when it is clearly formulated and expressed, because they have been indoctrinated by the non-Christians. They are so accustomed and agreeable to the non-Christian standard of social discourse, which promotes compromise, subtlety, and secrecy, that when biblical teachings are boldly announced in plain words, they are offended and repulsed. As long as you speak so ambiguously that most people cannot understand you and become offended, they do not mind that you tell the truth. But this way of thinking is precisely one of those things that sets itself up against the knowledge of Christ, and thus it is one of those things that we must criticize and demolish for his glory.

There is much more that I can say about apologetics, but to enable you to vindicate the Christian faith and to defeat every non-Christian in argumentation, there is nothing more that I must say, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength" (1 Corinthians 1:25). In our intellectual conflict with the non-Christians, it is easy to become invincible – the question is whether we will be faithful to put on the mind of Christ and proclaim the wisdom of God.

APPENDIX: AN ATTACK FORMULA²⁵

A discussion on the deficiencies of a mechanical understanding and practice of apologetics, including the use of formula in debate, is immensely helpful to the budding biblical apologist.

Some people have asked me to summarize all that they need to know about biblical apologetics in two or three paragraphs, or to reduce the entire method into a short list of bullet points. Indeed, it can be described in a few paragraphs, but these individuals often do not want a summary because they wish to reduce what they have already learned into a convenient form, but they wish to study a summary in order to obtain an initial understanding of it. However, a short summary leaves out so many details that it will offer limited help to someone who does not already understand this approach to apologetics. It cannot enable a person who is confused about it to understand it and implement it.

Let us take an example from another system of apologetics. Consider the cosmological argument. Even with something like this, it will not do just to memorize the steps. A person must understand the principles behind that argument and how he should defend the premises. Each opponent is different, and might have different objections to each step of the argument, or might present these objections in different ways. A person who merely memorizes the steps and the words can easily become lost in a debate.

Then, some people have submitted their own summaries and paraphrases for my approval. Although these efforts are often commendable, they suffer from significant inaccuracies, and they are usually too mechanical. Most of the time, their attempts betray a failure to grasp the essence of this approach. As I have always insisted, it does not consist of a formula or a series of steps, but a combination of a body of knowledge and a way of thinking – that is, biblical knowledge and rational thinking.

This body of knowledge is that which we defend, and with which we attack. This way of thinking is what governs our application of this body of knowledge in our interaction with unbiblical ideas. Since what is biblical is also rational, we can simply say that the essence of biblical apologetics is the biblical way of thinking. What appear to be recognizable "steps" in my presentation of this approach are its manifestations and not its essence. How it is presented can vary due to the context, such as the kinds of ideas we are seeking to counteract.

This is why biblical rationalism²⁶ carries unlimited power and flexibility in debate when it is correctly understood and practiced. It does not matter whether it is a written dialogue or an oral debate. It does not matter how the conversation starts or where it strays. It does not matter if the opponent is a child or an adult, a novice or an expert in a field. It does not matter even if the opponent's belief system is foreign, unknown, or randomly invented –

²⁵ Adapted from Vincent Cheung, "Students in the Real World."

²⁶ See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, and Captive to Reason*.

the biblical apologist adapts as the debate proceeds. He can use whatever he has available to him for various purposes. He can bring into the conversation what he understands from other fields to construct secondary or ad hominem arguments, or he can know nothing but Christ crucified. In every case, he is assured of victory.

Sometimes a person would study our materials and begin to practice biblical apologetics with great success, but then stumble over a particular argument or objection from an unbeliever. He suddenly does not know how to proceed, as if biblical apologetics does not apply to *this* challenge. In every case, the trouble is that the person has stopped applying the biblical way of thinking.

Here is an illustration from a non-Christian's perspective. Consider the morality of a relativist, who says that there is no absolute standard of good and evil, but that everything is "relative." A typical challenge might be, "Then, murder might also be good, and rape might not be evil." In itself this response presents no logical refutation of relativism, but only one of its implications. The relativist only has to say, "That's right," and move on. Yet, some relativists are stumped – not because relativism has been refuted, but because he has stopped thinking like a relativist.²⁷ Of course, relativism is false and can be refuted, but the point is that the relativist does not have to lose the debate *at this point*, that is, if he will just continue to think like a relativist.

Apply this to biblical apologetics. Some objections cause biblical apologists to stumble, not because they refute the biblical worldview, but because they temporarily derail these Christians from thinking consistently with it.²⁸ The difference is that, whereas relativism is false and will therefore crumble under rational analysis, the biblical worldview is perfect, and exhibits greater and greater brilliance the more it is scrutinized. However, this is demonstrated only if the apologist persists in a biblical way of thinking no matter what questions and objections are brought up.

Perhaps some of those who are too rigid with biblical apologetics make the mistake of thinking that the arguments themselves are a body of knowledge. They should be asking, "What should inform my thinking? And what should direct my thinking?" – it is revelation that informs (or provides correct content for thinking), and reason that directs (or ensures validity in thinking). But instead, they tend to ask, "What should I say to answer *this* question, *that* objection?"

They tend to memorize answers when they should learn the body of knowledge and way of thinking from which all answers arise. And this is why they would ask what to say to a particular challenge, but when they encounter a slight variation of the same thing, they must return to inquire again. Maybe memorized responses and convenient formulas provide a sense of security, but this is deceptive, because if they depend on these things, they in fact become more prone to failure in debate.

²⁷ This is probably because the relativist, inconsistent with his own principle of relativism, wishes to disapprove murder and rape.

²⁸ This is probably because the Christian, not completely renewed in his thinking, remains sympathetic to certain non-Christian beliefs and assumptions.

After the above warning and explanation, it might appear ironic that I will now present a formula for limited use in apologetics. But the preceding comments are necessary precisely because I am about to present this formula, since many people are already too prone to become mechanical in debate.

Although formulas should never be necessary, there are at least two acceptable uses for them.

First, formulas can help the beginner and the less accomplished apologist. The formula that I am about to offer will help you to begin and sustain a logical analysis of the opponent. It will give you something reliable to fall back on, and thus boost your confidence. But dependence on any formula will hinder a person's development in the long run, and so it is best to be weaned from its use.

Second, the deliberate use of a formula in debate can serve to humiliate an opponent. One way to demonstrate the foolishness of a non-biblical worldview and the ease with which it can be refuted is to defeat the non-Christian by the obvious and repeated use of a simple formula. It serves to show that the unbeliever cannot withstand any rational analysis, and that he cannot answer the most basic questions, things that even a toddler knows to ask. This also makes it easy for observers to perceive the inferiority of the unbeliever's position.

Then, another reason why I wish to present a formula is to show you what a good one should look like. Given that it is often a mistake to use formulas in debate, the problem is further aggravated when these formulas are lengthy, complicated, and inflexible. There are formulas that require a perfect setup – an attentive opponent who does not interrupt, an appropriate starting point for the conversation, and then a step-by-step procession from one item to another in the prescribed order. If one of these arguments carry any punch at all, it is neutralized when the opponent objects to a premise in the middle of the presentation, so that the debate becomes sidetracked.

In contrast, my formula is simple, flexible, and robust. It can function in total chaos. And except for the formula itself, there is no information to memorize. That said, it has limitations. This is the formula: "So? Why? Really?"²⁹ This is it. This is the entire formula. It is simple but powerful. Although there are only three words in it, using nothing but these three words, any Christian of any aptitude can crush any student, any professor, and any variety or combination of non-Christians.

The word "So?" refers to *relevance*. Many of the objections against the Christian faith are outright irrelevant to the debate. Even when the topic could be relevant, the unbelievers often fail to show this relevance. The same problem of irrelevance occurs when they present the case for their own positions. Therefore, one way to neutralize their arguments and objections is to question the relevance of what is said, and to demand the opponent to show this relevance.

²⁹ We can call it the SWR formula.

The word "Why?" refers to *justification*. Statements presented as arguments are often only assertions. You must ask the non-Christian why his assertions are true. It is likely that he will give you another set of unjustified assertions, and so you will need to ask "why" again. The other two words are also available to you. You can ask "So?" – that is, you can question the relevance between the two assertions or sets of assertions, and demand your opponent to show this relevance. With only these two words, you can expose the fact that the opponent's position lacks justification, and that not only are his objections irrelevant, but even the propositions within his own worldview are irrelevant to one another.

The word "Really?" refers to *validity*. In this context, validity does not refer to the truth of a position, but to the correct form of an argument. A "valid" argument is one in which the conclusion follows from the premises by necessary inference – that is, the premises *must* logically produce that conclusion, and it is the only possible conclusion given the premises. "Really?" is therefore posed against the relationship between premises and conclusions. So when you demand a non-Christian to provide justification for an assertion, and he gives you an argument to support this assertion, besides questioning the relevance of the argument, you should also question whether it is logically valid. Reasoning from intuition, sensation, induction, and the scientific method are all invalid, because they all proceed in logical leaps, and none of their conclusions are reached by logical necessity.

These three words apply to all non-Christians arguments, whether those that attack the Christian faith or those that defend non-Christian positions. As such, the formula can serve both offensive and defensive purposes. Since the arguments and objections from non-Christians are never consistently relevant, justified, and valid, anything that they say will quickly crumble under these three words. In fact, even one of these three words can destroy all non-Christian systems. No non-Christian worldview, philosophy, or religion can withstand a persistent pressure to show relevance, justification, or validity.

Given what I said against formulas, if this one can defeat all non-Christians, then is it not a good formula? Should we not make it a regular part of our apologetics? The answer is that almost anything can defeat the non-Christians, and the fact that something works does not make it a good or complete solution. Instead of aiming for the minimum, we must strive to be thorough in our refutation of non-Christian systems, to destroy all that they believe in, and then we must faithfully declare the entire biblical worldview.

The three words in the formula remind us of the questions that we should ask. When Christians come across anti-biblical arguments, sometimes they tend to react according to whether these arguments "feel" right to them. If they can sense nothing wrong, then they do not know how to respond. This happens frequently with those whose minds have not been renewed by sound doctrines. The formula reminds them to be deliberate in examining the arguments for relevance, justification, and validity.

On the other hand, the skilled apologist possesses superior intellectual reflex. Since he has been trained to follow deeply ingrained biblical and rational paths, his perception is quicker and clearer, and he naturally comes up with stronger arguments and countermoves. He does as if by instinct that which the beginner must deliberate upon. For this reason, rather than

become satisfied with a decent formula, the biblical apologist must strive to turn his craft into a natural reflex.

Moreover, the formula does not include any actual information, such as the biblical view of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, soteriology, or any other doctrine. It is possible to devise a more complex formula that includes some of this information, but it is certain that the full scope and depth of biblical rationalism can never be reduced to a manageable one. Our simple formula is nothing more than a convenient way to remember one aspect of biblical apologetics.

Of course, even when the Christian uses a formula, he should usually vary his expressions. He could keep on saying, "So? So? So?" But unless he is trying to humiliate his opponent by the obvious use of a rigid line of questioning, he should demand proof of relevance in other ways. He could say, "How is this relevant to the debate?" Or, "Even if this point is correct, how does it refute Christianity?" When it comes to validity, he can say, "I asked you to justify your assertion and you gave me this argument, but the conclusion does not follow from the premises. Just because A and B are true does not mean that C must be true. So there is still no justification for your assertion."

The Christian must be weaned from rigid tactics and formulas. The power and beauty of the biblical method are unleashed when he moves from bullet points and memorized answers to where he can maintain natural interaction with a non-Christian using a biblical way of thinking. The biblical apologist is one who thinks like Christ, and not just one who has memorized a set of answers. And if he has the mind of Christ, then an intellectual confrontation will have less to do with methods and techniques, but for the non-Christian it will be like an actual conversation with the Risen Lord.