

# CAPTIVE TO REASON

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## Preface to 2009 Edition

This book is a collection of short articles that mainly deal with Christian philosophy and apologetics. These articles explain and apply my thinking to particular contexts and questions, and as such, they supplement what I have previously written. And because this book is best used as a supplement, I encourage you to read my earlier writings on these subjects before reading the articles in this book.<sup>1</sup>

Many of these articles were written in response to messages from readers, and I usually include an edited version of the original message to accompany each of my replies.<sup>2</sup> I have changed or withheld their names to protect their privacy. This is not a problem since the quoted statements do not contribute to the actual substance of the articles, but they provide only the contexts for me to present my answers and explanations.

To clearly distinguish the words of the inquirers, their statements are indented and displayed in a different font. This has eliminated the need for me to always specify that a certain article was written in answer to a question, or to specify that a certain portion of text was a message from a reader.

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<sup>1</sup> See, among others, Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions* and *Presuppositional Confrontations*.

<sup>2</sup> Among other modifications, for some articles I have attached numbers to the other person's statements, so that you can more easily recognize the answers that correspond to them.

## 1. Starting with the Answer<sup>3</sup>

We know that the axiom of biblical revelation is true because God revealed it, and we know that God revealed it because the same logically undeniable axiom tells us so. As the Westminster Confession says, "The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is Truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God."

Let me use the so-called "problem of evil" to make a point about this. Now, I have written an answer to the problem of evil,<sup>4</sup> but this answer would not be necessary if there were no "problem" of evil to start with, that is, if there were no argument against Christianity made on the basis of the existence of evil. The existence of evil itself is neither a question nor an objection, so it does not demand an answer, defense, or explanation from us. A response is needed only when someone uses it to formulate an objection against Christianity.

Although I had acknowledge the existence of evil and had reflected on it, I never considered the "problem" of evil until some time after my conversion. It never occurred to me that evil could be the basis of an objection against Christianity, and even now the idea seems silly. God can do whatever pleases him, and he is righteous in all that he does. For a long time, I did not regard this positive belief as a response to any objection against Christianity – to me it was a simple truth about God. Nevertheless, this is one of the main biblical answers to the problem of evil.

I started with the answer – that is, I started with the biblical teaching – but the problem of evil is such a foolish and farfetched argument that it never occurred to me until much later when I read about it in my studies. So until then I never regarded the biblical teaching as an answer to anything.<sup>5</sup> When I became aware of the problem of evil, the biblical teaching regarding God's sovereign right and power turned into an answer against the objection. It is the same truth, only that I now express and employ it in a way that it functions as an answer against a particular challenge.

The Bible is true because God has revealed the truth in it – as long as there is no challenge to this, there is no apologetics. Thus, apologetics implies the presence of sin. If we were sinless, we would always recognize God's voice and believe whatever he tells us. There would be no objections against which to defend ourselves, and there would be no false beliefs for us to attack. If there is no rebellion and unbelief, then there is no need for apologetics, although there will still be theology. When we use the biblical or presuppositional approach to apologetics, we are using what we affirm in our theology to

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<sup>3</sup> The following is an edited message that I sent as part of a discussion on apologetics.

<sup>4</sup> See Vincent Cheung, "The Problem of Evil."

<sup>5</sup> I never had any objections against Christianity, even before my conversion. My awareness of objections against Christianity come from unbelievers who voice them and from some of the believers who attempt to answer them.

interact with our opponents in a way that revelation now functions as a defensive and offensive weapon.

This is an essential difference between the biblical or presuppositional approach and the classical or evidential approach.

In biblical or presuppositional apologetics, we start with the answer, so that some of what we say in apologetics depends on the nature of the challenge, since our apologetics is really an adaptation of our theology to a particular situation.

On the other hand, the classical or evidential method starts from a point that is very far from the answer, and then it tries to get to the answer from there. It deliberately begins from the sinner's own starting point – from one's subjective intuition, fallible sensation, or a false axiom. Since its own starting point (common with the sinner's) is not the answer, and not a word from God, it must argue even if there were no unbelief, rebellion, or objection.

This cannot be heaven's way of thinking, but as Christians, we have the mind of Christ even now. If revelation is really the answer, and if it is only through revelation that we can truly understand and interpret anything, then it is self-defeating to put aside this necessary revelation in order to get back to revelation from some non-biblical starting point, which starting point is adopted only because of man's sinfulness and rebellion in the first place.

Therefore, to learn the biblical approach of apologetics,<sup>6</sup> we must become familiar with the biblical system – that is, what Scripture has revealed about various subjects and their relationships with one another.<sup>7</sup> We must also understand what things are necessary to every intellectual system, so that we may grasp and critique every opposing system as we encounter it.<sup>8</sup>

If there is no challenge against revelation, then it continues to stand true on the basis of its logical necessity and self-attesting authority – for God cannot swear by anyone higher than himself – and this is the system of truth that we affirm. To the extent that we correctly understand Scripture, there will be no essential modifications to our understanding of this revealed system even when we get to heaven, but only increased understanding of the same revelation, as well as additions to it.

At the same time, the biblical system logically excludes all non-biblical systems, so that as long as our system stands true, all others are false by logical necessity. Then, when there is a direct challenge against it, we only need to adapt its contents to answer it, both to defend our faith, and to crush the opposition.

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<sup>6</sup> It is called by various names, such as, dogmatism, presuppositionalism, biblical rationalism, biblical foundationalism, etc.

<sup>7</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology, Ultimate Questions, and Presuppositional Confrontations*.

<sup>8</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Apologetics in Conversation*.

In other words, in practicing a biblical or presuppositional approach to apologetics, we are acting as God's instruments to unleash his own revealed wisdom to vindicate himself and to defeat the enemy. Rather than using our intuition, sensation, or fallacious reasoning to testify about God, our apologetic is essentially an expression and application of God's testimony about himself, since God is his own best witness, and he can swear by no one greater.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This has been a theological explanation of what happens in biblical or presuppositional apologetics. For more information, including practical instructions, I recommend the exposition of Acts 17 in my *Presuppositional Confrontations*, and also my *Apologetics in Conversation*.

## 2. Captive to Reason<sup>10</sup>

Gordon Stein asked Greg Bahnsen what it would take to convince him that Christianity is false. I do not recall Bahnsen being too sharp on this issue. How would you deal with this question?

In one sense, this question is difficult to answer. It is difficult because I perceive that any attempt to consider how Christianity can be refuted or how I can be convinced that Christianity is false requires a full acceptance of Christianity in the first place. That is, because the presuppositions of the biblical worldview are the necessary presuppositions of all thinking and all knowledge, it is impossible for me to even conceive of how Christianity can be refuted.

Bahnsen once said that if someone were to discover the bones of Jesus, then he would admit that Christianity is false. The point itself is true. If a person discovers the bones of Jesus, thus showing that he never rose from the dead, then we can indeed say that Christianity is false. However, this is almost irrelevant, since apart from the full Christian worldview, how can you have an epistemology that can learn the very meaning of the expression, "the bones of Jesus," and how can you have an epistemology that enables you to identify the bones?

Even if we grant that, if someone were to discover the bones of Jesus, then Christianity is false, given what I have established elsewhere about epistemology, we must also grant that, if Christianity is false, then we can never identify the bones of Jesus. I have established that even if we begin with the correct presuppositions by which knowledge is possible, all scientific and empirical methods are in themselves logically fallacious, so that any conclusion derived from the use of such methods is at best an unjustified opinion or an arbitrary conjecture, and not knowledge. Therefore, Christianity can never be refuted by any scientific or empirical method, and a person's bones can never be infallibly identified.

Thus the question is difficult only in the sense that I cannot provide the type of answer that an unbeliever would expect. But then, the unbeliever's expectation is based on his irrational epistemology, so that I am not rationally obligated to respect it. Perhaps the simplest and truest answer to the question is, "I will believe that Christianity is false if you can prove it to be false"; or, to be more precise, "I will believe that Christianity is false if you can prove that which is true to be false."

In other words, I insist that it is logically impossible to refute Christianity, so that to refute Christianity would be to establish a logical contradiction, which is impossible. Of course, anybody can physically say anything they want, but it does not mean that what he says will make any sense, and I am saying that no argument against Christianity can make any sense at all.

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<sup>10</sup> The following is an edited correspondence on apologetics.



The most that I can do is to listen to an unbeliever when he tries to refute Christianity, because I cannot even imagine how I would do it myself. Of course unbelievers will have various ideas, and they will try various arguments, but this is because they are stupid and do not realize that their arguments are complete nonsense until someone who knows better comes along to point it out.

In my books, I show that I am aware of the relevant issues and the objections from unbelievers, and how I would answer them. I clearly explain my method of apologetics, and how this method can defend the biblical worldview and refute its opponents. So I am not coming from the standpoint of a non-rational or irrational fideism. Rather, Christianity is so rationally necessary that I cannot conceive of how to refute it without having my own system of apologetics defeat my attempt.

Some people assert that if a claim is not falsifiable, then neither can it be established, or it is simply meaningless. However, this depends on what kind of claim we are talking about and why it is not falsifiable. What if it is not falsifiable because it is necessarily true? If something is necessarily true, then it is not falsifiable; if something is falsifiable, then it is not necessarily true. Our claim, which we can rationally justify, is that Christianity is necessarily true.

If someone claims that nothing is necessarily true, then this claim itself is not necessarily true. He must offer an argument showing that it is necessarily true that nothing is necessarily true, but if his argument is sound, then it refutes itself (which means that it is impossible to construct a sound argument for this conclusion), and if his argument is not sound, then he fails to prove his conclusion (that nothing is necessarily true).

There is no reason to accept this principle of falsifiability in the first place. It is just an excuse for failing to refute Christianity. It is not my fault that unbelievers are intellectual wimps. If they cannot compete, then they should stay out of the ring, instead of inventing silly theories to excuse themselves.

My answer to the question is what it should be if Christianity is true and if I am a Christian. That is, my mind is anchored by the Word of God, and held captive by the truth, so that I cannot see a way out and I do not want a way out. If I can see a way out or if I want a way out, then either the gospel does not have the power that it claims, or I am not really a Christian. If I am a Christian, I should not be able to perceive any way to refute Christianity.

If the unbeliever has the truth, then he will have to show me; he will have to make his case without my help. But he is prevented at the very beginning by the biblical method of apologetics and argumentation, and by our challenge against their thinking on the foundational or presuppositional level.

The truth is that the non-Christian is also held captive by the Logos of God, and by his innate knowledge of God's attributes and God's laws, so that his mind can only function on God's terms, even as he rebels against Christ, who is Reason. The non-Christian is deceived into thinking that he is a "free thinker," but the only thing that he is running from is Reason.

Still, he cannot escape, for Reason will crush him every time, and grind his futile arguments to powder.

### 3. Occasionalism and Empiricism<sup>11</sup>

– A –

What do you think about someone (a materialist) who says that the same concept can be located at two spatio-temporal locations? This happens because the brain is like a computer that copies another computer's program. So, when I speak, the sound waves enter your ears and your brain copies the concept that I had in my head.

I would expect a materialist to say this – it seems to follow from his view of reality. I can directly challenge him on this point, but I can also demand justification for premises that are logically prior to it.

For example, I do not believe (1) that a "concept" is physical, and I do not believe (2) that brains "think" at all. Rather, thinking occurs in the incorporeal mind, and the mind continues to think when it separates from the body at death. Now, suppose I challenge the materialist on (2). If he assumes the reliability of science and empiricism in his attempt to prove that brains think, then I will challenge science and empiricism. My own position on this topic of thinking and concepts is a version of occasionalism, so I am able to avoid all the problems that I present against the materialist.

If the point of your question is about communication in the materialist scheme, then it is best to challenge empiricism right away. If it is possible for two people to communicate under the scheme of materialism, then when communication occurs, there would be two physical copies of the same thought. However, I deny that communication is possible under materialism, so the materialist will need to first prove that communication is possible by an empirical epistemology – that is, even if we were to ignore for the moment whether materialism is true, whether thoughts are physical, and whether brains can think.

As for occasionalism, I use the expression "on the occasion" to describe epistemological and metaphysical relations more than I use the bare term "occasionalism." Many beginners read my books and they would have no idea what the term means, so I often expand the sentence to use the explanation or the meaning of the term instead of the term itself.

My position is that God's providence includes complete control of everything about everything, which means that he must be the sole power controlling all communication and knowledge acquisition. Using the brain as an illustration, if there is any relation between the brain and thinking, it would mean that on the occasion that God causes a thought in the mind, he also causes activity in the brain; and on the occasion that he causes activity in the brain, he also causes a thought in the mind. The brain has no necessary and consistent relationship with thinking – thinking can be done apart from it. At death, God separates a person's mind from his body, and thus also from his brain. God continues to cause thoughts

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<sup>11</sup> This is an edited correspondence with a devout follower of Cornelius Van Til.

in the person's mind, but on those occasions that he does this, he no longer causes any corresponding activity in the brain that used to be associated with this person's mind.

Jonathan Edwards affirmed a form of occasionalism, and also Malebranche, as well as a number of other Christian thinkers. You could see Calvin, Luther, etc., at times saying things that sound like occasionalism. In any case, it is unimportant who affirms it or who rejects it. It is nothing less than a necessary implication and a consistent application of the biblical doctrine of providence.

– B –

Why would you deny communication for them? Is it because when you communicate, you are communicating propositions, and propositions are not material, so that the same proposition cannot be in more than one spatio-temporal location?

That would be the logically prior reason – I do deny that propositions are material.

But even if we ignore the logically prior issues, they still need to show that they can communicate by speaking and hearing. Whether propositions are material or not, they need to give me a logical proof showing that when one hears a proposition spoken, he actually hears what is spoken. That is, they need a proof for empiricism.

– C –

(1) Now they would probably say that your response is self-refuting, since you had to use your physical mouth to ask the question, and you assumed that my ears would hear your question. At this point you would deny this in favor of your occasionalism, right?

(2) On the other hand, I could say that within my worldview, God made our mouths to communicate and our ears to receive information, but within his worldview and by empiricism, how would he know that he is actually hearing what is spoken? At this point, he would probably reassert his conclusion that he knows this because he answered my question.

(1)

Occasionalism is my positive answer – it would describe my understanding of what happens in communication. But I do not need to mention this first.

Rather, I can first point out that the materialist begs the question by assuming a physical world without justification. I can illustrate this problem by pushing the debate into a purely mental world. That is, I can suggest that we might be having the conversation in a dream, or some purely mental state. How do we know that we are not? It begs the question to say that we know we are in the physical world because we are using physical organs to speak and to hear, because we might be speaking and hearing in a purely mental world, in which case no physical organs are involved. Since, by definition, the materialist constantly needs the physical world in his philosophy, he cannot proceed until he provides the rational justification that I demand.

On the other hand, all my basic principles are intact, and my worldview is immune and undamaged, since in my worldview, the physical world is deduced from a non-physical principle. So I can deny that I am necessarily using my physical mouth when I ask or answer anything – the materialist will have to prove it to me.<sup>12</sup>

So when I suggest that we might be having the conversation in a purely mental world, it challenges the assumption that we are necessarily operating in a physical world. If the opponent's philosophy cannot survive in a purely mental world, or if he cannot by rational argumentation reintroduce a physical world into the conversation once forced into a purely mental world, then he loses the debate.

(2)

Since you follow Van Til, I assume that you will want to formulate an answer that is consistent with his philosophy. I cannot help you with this, because I do not follow him, and I do not think that a good answer can arise from his philosophy. This is because, at best, he postpones adopting empiricism by one logical step by asserting that biblical presuppositions can account for the reliability of sensations. But I have shown elsewhere that sensations are inherently unreliable, so that nothing can justify it or account for it. Also, since his philosophy assumes that sensations are required to access these biblical presuppositions in the first place, he in fact embraces empiricism at the start. Therefore, his philosophy is doomed to immediate and complete failure no less than the philosophy of the materialist or empiricist.

Your argument makes a false inference from the Bible. The Bible indeed teaches that God made our bodies and organs; however, just because God made the ear does not mean that its abilities and purposes are what you think they are. Scripture itself shows that the eyes and ears are often mistaken, and people who are supposedly seeing and hearing the same things often come to different conclusions, or disagree on what they are seeing and hearing (2 Kings 3:20-22; John 12:27-29).

All the problems with empiricism remain for you. Even if you begin from biblical presuppositions, there is no way to show in any instance whether your sensation is correct. Even if you begin from biblical presuppositions, you still cannot rescue what is inherently irrational and logically impossible.

With occasionalism, there is no problem. The ears at best provide the occasion upon which God communicates directly to my mind – on the occasion of the sensation but independent of the sensation. In addition, he is the one who controls everything about both the occasion and the communication.

It is unlikely that a materialist will think of this and bring it up. Since he is an empiricist himself, it is unlikely that he will challenge you on empiricism. So the main issue is not one of winning debates, but of truth and honesty.

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<sup>12</sup> I do not deny that there is a physical world. Rather, I am saying that I do not have to be in the physical world in order to function.

– D –

(1) How do you know you are not dreaming?

(2) It would be fallacious for my opponent to argue that since sensations are sometimes mistaken, therefore they are always mistaken. Or, it would be fallacious to say that if sometimes you cannot know whether your sensations are working properly, therefore you can never know whether they are working properly.

(1)

I might be dreaming, and it does no damage to my worldview, and all my basic principles are intact. That is the point. But I can be dreaming and still affirm that there is a physical world, not because I trust my sensations, but because the Bible reveals this to me.

On the other hand, my sensations feel the same to me when I think I am dreaming as when I think I am not dreaming, so by my sensations I cannot reliably confirm whether or not I am dreaming. Even if my sensations are different when I think I am dreaming as when I think I am not dreaming, how do I know that I am really dreaming when I think that I am dreaming, and that I am not dreaming when I think that I am not dreaming? Perhaps I have them in reverse, so that when I feel a certain way and I think that I am dreaming, I should really think that I am not dreaming when I feel that way, and vice versa.

But since I reject empiricism, this poses no problem.

(2)

Unless you can show how you know at any given instance whether or not that particular sensation is reliable, then you cannot justify a policy that allows you to trust any given instance of sensation.

Even if some instances of sensations are reliable, unless you can show which instances of sensation are reliable and which instances are unreliable, it makes no difference – you have no warrant to trust any of them, since you have no way of knowing when your sensations are right and when they are wrong.

Your opponent does not need to show that you never sense what you think you sense. As long as your sensations are not infallible, and as long as you have no non-empirical infallible standard by which to judge each instance of sensation, the result is that no instance of sensation is reliable.

Likewise, your opponent does not need to show that your sensations are never working properly. As long as you cannot infallibly show whether they are working properly in each instance, a general acknowledgement that they might often work properly is useless, since you still do not know whether they are working properly in any given instance. Also, what does it mean for sensations to work "properly"? If for sensations to work properly imply their reliability in gaining knowledge, then this begs the question.

– E –

But could they say that since sometimes your dreams have been false (i.e. a big monster chasing you), how do you know that you are communicating truth? You would probably say that to deny your worldview, whether in a dream or not, would result in irrationality, and that the laws of logic, necessary inferences, etc., hold in dreams as well.

I affirm the things that I believe not because of what I "see," whether in the physical or the mental world (or a dream), but because of divine revelation and logical necessity.

It would be convenient if an empiricist would ask this question about dreams. It would be, in fact, a challenge against him and not against me. Unless he can answer his own question, it would mean that we must not trust what we sense whether or not we are in a dream. It provides yet another illustration of the impossibility of gaining any knowledge by sensation.

In any case, the real contrast is not between the dream state and the non-dream state, but between a purely mental world and a physical world. I refer to a dream only to make it easier for one to envision a purely mental world.

Also, we need to talk about what is meant by "real." If a monster chases me in a purely mental world, or in a dream, then this is what is "real" in the purely mental world or in the dream. That is, it is really true that a monster is chasing me in the dream.

On the other hand, the question seems to imply that if something does not happen in the physical world, then it is not "real," but this begs the question.

– F –

I would say that (1) God made us this way, and (2) this is how we normally operate. (3) There needs to be a proper environment so that if I were on drugs, in poor lighting, deprived of sleep, etc., then I would not have a hard time saying that I was mistaken about some trivial observation, but sensations are generally reliable.

(1)

Your position is the same as the materialist and the empiricist. The difference is that you appeal to God as a "just so" defense for your indefensible epistemology. You need to show from Scripture that God made us "this way." It is not enough to show only that God made the eyes and the ears, but you must show that they do what you claim that they do, that you can reliably derive knowledge through them by sensation – through some inherent function in them – and that you would know in any given instance why that instance of sensation is reliable.

(2)

It begs the question to say that we normally operate a certain way, when how we normally operate is one of the things in dispute. Your statement assumes that knowledge normally

comes by sensations, or that sensations are normally reliable. But this is the very thing that we disagree about.

Moreover, even if we normally operate a certain way, it does not therefore prove that we are correct. I can just say that we are normally wrong.

(3)

You will have to show that Scripture says that sensations are reliable under certain conditions, and that it is unreliable under these other conditions you listed. Since you claim that Scripture accounts for sensations, then you need to show how it accounts for them.

You cannot make your assertion about these conditions if you "discovered" them by your sensations in the first place, since that would beg the question. That is, how do you know that drugs affect your sensation? You cannot claim to know this by sensation if you have yet to establish the reliability of sensation. How do you know that lighting affects the reliability of sensations? In fact, how do you know that the lighting is good or bad in a room? Maybe the lighting is good (what is good?), but you are going blind.

Also, even if Scripture says that sensations are reliable under certain conditions, and that they are unreliable under other conditions, you must still have a way to discover what kind of condition you are currently under. If you use sensations to discover what condition you are under in order to determine whether your current sensations are reliable, then this begs the question.

– G –

(1) The knife cuts both ways and you need to show from Scripture all the things that you affirm and counter me with.

(2) Also, I think you would have to deny some common sense things, so that you do not know that "Vincent is a man." You may be willing to bite that bullet, I do not know.

(1)

Yes, I have done that in my books, showing in detail that my position is in accordance with Scripture. Please read them.

But for you to say that "the knife cuts both ways" is to admit that it cuts *your* way. So by your own statement, you have accepted the obligation to show from Scripture that your view is correct.

(2)

Is "common sense" now your authority? What happened to Scripture? What happened to reason? What happened to sensations even? I am skeptical against common sense, and I think that the very idea is incoherent. In fact, common sense is not common and it makes no sense. What common sense dictates is not the same for everyone, and what is sometimes regarded as common sense is irrational and false. Arguing on the basis of common sense betrays desperation.



If I know that "Vincent is a man," I certainly do not know this by my sensations<sup>13</sup> or by common sense,<sup>14</sup> but by illumination from the Logos, in accordance with my explanation on occasionalism. To assert a belief on the basis of common sense is another "just so" tactic to excuse oneself from a lack of rational warrant for the belief.

If you "know" something, you *know* something – only opinion can be held by degrees of rational reliability. Therefore, if I do not *know* something – if the proposition is formed in my mind by some fallible process rather than by God's direct insertion as something that he considers true and justified – then I do not *know* it.

Therefore, I will never say, "By common sense, I know that I am a man, and this proposition that I have derived from common sense is just as rationally reliable as the Scripture, or God's revelation. Both common sense and Scripture give me equal rational warrant, and so I believe common sense just as much as I believe Scripture. My own 'sense' of reality is just as good as God's revelation. Scripture is not more reliable and certain than common sense."

I refuse to state or imply that what I can discover apart from God's revelation is just as good as God's revelation. So I refuse to say that "common sense" is just as reliable as Scripture. To make such a claim would be both irrational and irreverent. You seem eager to "bite that bullet," showing no distinction between the two, but I refuse to do it.

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<sup>13</sup> What do I sense to know that "Vincent is a man"? And how do I know that this is what I must sense?

<sup>14</sup> What "sense" that is "common" will tell me "Vincent is a man"?

## 4. Short Answers to Several Criticisms<sup>15</sup>

– A –

One thing that makes me unable to understand how anyone could hold Cheung's belief<sup>16</sup> is that the nerves in the brain are sensory, and thus by making the decision to think specific things and change thought processes in their minds, are they not thus relying on their senses in order to even think, and thus relying on their senses to deduce with logic and attain knowledge?

This begs the question. It assumes the verdict of empirical science on the brain's abilities, purposes, and functions. It assumes that some or even all thinking occurs in the brain. And it either identifies the brain with the mind, or it assumes a necessary relationship between the two.

I reject all of these assumptions and would demand rational justification for all of them before permitting any assertion or objection to be made on the basis of these assumptions. I deny the reliability of empiricism, and I deny the reliability of empirical science. Thus I also deny the verdict of science on the brain's abilities, purposes, and functions. I deny that *any* thinking occurs in the brain; rather, I affirm that whatever coincidentally occurs in the brain while someone thinks, thinking itself occurs only in the incorporeal mind.

It follows that I also deny that there is any necessary relationship between the brain and the mind. There may be a relationship between the two as God causes correlating events in them, but the relationship is not consistent, permanent, or necessary.

– B –

Here is something that is problematic: one uses his senses to read the words in the Bible. If the senses allow us to recall what we already know about God,

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<sup>15</sup> The following includes a number of objections against my rejection of empiricism. They were taken from an online discussion board whose members included many followers of Cornelius Van Til, and sent to me by one of my readers. They represent some of the frequent misunderstandings that Christian empiricists have toward my position and their fallacious arguments against it. Although the objections were written by several different people, it is not important to designate the author of each objection, so for the sake of convenience, I have edited my answers as if all the objections were written by one person. Since the reader who sent me the objections was familiar with my writings and my arguments, most of my answers to him were short. To make them understandable to a broader audience, I have slightly expanded some of these answers.

<sup>16</sup> This originally said "Clark's belief." Critics often identify my system of philosophy and apologetics with that of Gordon H. Clark. Many of them have a narrow awareness of the Christian world, and so tend to categorize people by associating them with the few writers that they know. Although I agree with Clark on many points, agreement does not necessarily signal influence. But as they do in many other cases, my critics tend to confuse correlation with causation. I discourage an identification with Clark also because I cannot be certain that he would have agreed with some of the main points in my system. Thus it would be unfair to him to regard my philosophy as nothing more than a restatement or an application of his. I have changed this to "Cheung's belief" in this edition to prevent confusion, and to stress that I speak for myself and not for Clark.

then what of other parts in the Bible? For example, David's adultery. It is hard to imagine that we already knew about this adultery via some innate knowledge. So, we cannot know that David committed adultery even though it is recorded in the infallible word of God.

This entails a very bad misunderstanding, and it reflects the lack of basic reading comprehension that seems to be common to all my critics.

I never said that all knowledge is innate, only that all knowledge must come from God apart from sensation, but that some knowledge comes from God on the occasion of sensation. That is, the sensation might correlate with the time of God's act on the mind, but knowledge does not come from the sensation itself, or from an inference from the sensation.

As for the claim that we must use the senses to read the Bible, I have answered this in several other places. Among other things, the person begs the question by assuming his position without warrant.

Although I have refuted the necessity of sensations in reading the Bible, even if we assume this necessity for the sake of argument, this alone would not prove the reliability of sensations. That is, the assumption that we need something does not also imply that we have it. Therefore, unless this critic can prove empiricism, we would just end up with skepticism, which means that *no one* can read the Bible.

By his own standard, this critic cannot read the Bible or know what is written in it before he proves empiricism. On the other hand, I can know what is in the Bible precisely because I reject empiricism.

– C –

I do not see how he can deny that we can know *anything* through sense perception. Surely, we can even know certain things about God through sense perception (Romans 1).

I have dealt with Romans 1 in several places in my books, showing that it does not entail empiricism.<sup>17</sup>

We ought to be reminded of God on any occasion in which we come into contact with his creation, although sinners suppress this knowledge because of their wickedness. However, the critic's statement requires more than what this passage allows. He implies that the knowledge of God can come "through sense perception" itself.

That is, a person has a sensation, and he can "know certain things about God" either directly through this sensation, or he can "know certain things about God" by making valid

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<sup>17</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions*, chapter 1, and *Presuppositional Confrontations*, chapters 1 and 2.

inferences from this sensation. This is, of course, the Roman Catholic approach to theology and philosophy, an approach that is contradicted by Scripture.

Nevertheless, if he insists that he can directly know God by sensation or reason his way to God from sensation, then he should write out the proof so that we can consider it.

– D –

I would be interested in seeing if a third man argument would work against this, since it is one of the most devastating argument against Plato's theory of knowledge (recollection), which seems to be, with some modifications, similar to Cheung's.

If we must compare, I am closer to Augustine, and the Logos doctrine of various Church Fathers, not Plato.

That said, my position is just the necessary implication of the biblical doctrines of divine sovereignty and providence.

Or is God sovereign over all things, except sensation and knowledge acquisition?

– E –

I do not have the view that facts bear their own meaning. I would tend more towards Quine's "web" program. But nonetheless, you use your senses to obtain knowledge. Tell me, how would you know how many ants were in your backyard? Did you know this previously?

He never tells us how any knowledge can come from sensation, but keeps on saying that it must be so. None of the things that he says necessarily entails that any knowledge can come from sensation.

He accuses me of following Plato (which I deny) – but is he now following Quine (which he admits)?

And who says that anyone can know how many ants are in his backyard? Does he know? If he does not know how many ants are in his backyard, then how can he bring this up as if it is an argument against my position?

As for knowing "previously," this is again the misunderstanding that I say that all knowledge is innate, which I have never taught.

– F –

But since, in some cases, our senses are required to obtain knowledge (e.g., how many ants are in my back yard), then I would say that in those cases senses are a necessary feature of gaining knowledge.

This begs the question. The argument amounts to this: "But since our senses are required in some cases, the senses are necessary in those cases." Is this an argument, or a lesson in

synonyms? I can just as easily say, "But since the senses are never required, they are never necessary."

Indeed, if the senses are required, then the senses are necessary. But this does not prove that the senses are necessary. Are the senses necessary? And necessary for what? What do they do? How do they do it?

– G –

If God conveys *all* things, then he conveys one person's belief that a heretic is correct, and also another person's belief that he is not correct! God is not the author of confusion. I think this is devastating.

This is a significant and instructive objection, because it demonstrates the devastating consequence of disagreeing with my position, that is, the biblical teaching that God controls and facilitates all things, including false beliefs. My position is not that God affirms false beliefs as true in his revelation, but that he is sovereign over all things, and that this must include control over false beliefs. Thus he reveals only the truth in Scripture, but he controls whether someone believes in it. When a person rejects the truth, he does this under the control of God, who also controls what falsehoods he believes instead.

My position insists that God exercises exhaustive control over the heretic, and that God is the sole metaphysical power that conveys even false beliefs to the mind. The critic rejects this, and this is what plunges him into his own heresy. His denial that God sovereignly and righteously controls all things, and thus also conveys false beliefs to the heretic, necessarily implies that there is another metaphysical power that conveys false information to the mind.

That is, the critic implies that man has the metaphysical power apart from God to take up false beliefs, or that some foreign power, perhaps the devil, has the metaphysical power apart from God to introduce false beliefs to the heretic. This amounts to saying that God is not the sole metaphysical power in the universe, and that there is at least one other power that controls much of the world on a metaphysical level.

If this is not heresy, then nothing is heresy. It amounts to an attack on the Christian God, or God as he is revealed in Scripture, and it amounts to a rejection of the Christian faith. It is a form of metaphysical dualism that acknowledges two opposing powers of good and evil, instead of one God who reigns supreme. It is possible that this critic does not understand the implication of his objection, but if he insists on his position after this has been explained to him, he should probably be excommunicated from the church.

As for his appeal to the expression "the author of confusion," it is a misuse, and shows that he fails to understand the verse in which it appears. I have addressed this in another publication.<sup>18</sup> In any case, we must not ignore, and still less condone, this widespread rebellion against God's sovereignty.

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<sup>18</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *The Author of Sin*.

– H –

Furthermore, the observations are not dependent on the molecules! The molecules are the same, regardless. It is the way man's brain interprets the collection of molecules that results in hallucination.

This does not directly attack my position, but it betrays the person's fallacious thinking.

It begs the question. He assumes the teachings of science, and he assumes premises that could never be established if empiricism is false. He should first prove empiricism and science before using these premises, since empiricism and science are the things being questioned.

What are molecules? Do we know that there are such things? Really, we know that? We are sure? How?

As for the comment on "the way man's brain interprets the collection of molecules," how does he know that? Does the brain "think" at all? Does it interpret anything at all?

– I –

If God is in control of *everything*, and conveys *everything* to people, then, what about this: John "sees" a bee on a rose, but Tim does not see it. John believes that his observation was true. Tim believes the converse. So, God conveyed A and not-A?

Of course. So what?

There is only a problem if we say that God *affirms* both A and not-A.

Consider what this critic is thinking. His objection implies that God does not really control *everything*. In fact, his challenge is made against the position that God is "in control" of everything. In other words, he does not believe that God is "in control" of everything.

It is clear that the conflict is not first about empiricism and the reliability of sensations, although these are certainly involved. Rather, the problem is that this critic does not even affirm the Christian God, or God as he is revealed in Scripture. The Christian God is certainly "in control" of everything, but this critic denies it.

He speaks as if false beliefs occurs by man's autonomy, or as if man possesses independence from God even on the metaphysical level. If he cannot believe that God controls false beliefs, then how can he believe that God is now directly sustaining Satan himself? Or as Luther affirms, that God even now controls (not only sustains) Satan?<sup>19</sup>

His objection also provides an illustration against the reliability of sensations. John sees one thing, Tim does not see it, or he sees something different. How would this critic settle the disagreement? He does not tell us.

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<sup>19</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Ephesians*, and Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*.

– J –

Now, of course God can tell you how many ants are in your backyard, but is this the normal operation of how things work? Indeed, I am very interested in exploring this concept and the view that there is no new revelation.

My position is not that there is "new revelation," but that God's control over all mental acts and events *is* the normal operation of things. It is a matter of ordinary providence.

This critic implies that if God exerts control over anything today, then that must be a miracle. And if he controls knowledge, then there must be new revelation (in the same sense as biblical revelation). Is this person a deist?

I believe that even the death of a sparrow is controlled by God, but I do not call that a miracle, since a miracle is special providence, but the death of a sparrow comes under ordinary providence.

Likewise, I affirm that knowledge comes under the control of God's ordinary providence. I would insist that anyone who affirms the biblical doctrine of providence, or who affirms the Christian God, must agree with this position.

In contrast, this critic wishes to protect the independence of sensations, the autonomy of evil, and assign a spontaneous power to errors. His position is inconsistent with the Christian faith.

– K –

The whole faculty of man, which God created with eyes and ears in order to learn and know things about his environment, does use his senses to acquire knowledge. But this cannot be separated from his rationality – seeing a tree and coming to a conclusion also involves a chain of reasoning.

This begs the question. Just because God created these organs does not mean that they are for the purposes and functions that this critic claims for them. He says that God created eyes and ears "in order to learn," but this is the point in dispute. Asserting it again does not make it true.

Then, he admits that seeing a tree and coming to a conclusion involves a chain of reasoning. Good! This gets closer to my point: Is the chain of reasoning logically valid? Write it out as a syllogism and let us examine it.

– L –

Here is my point about John and Tim. I said that God told one a *truth* and the other a *lie*. Does God lie?

This involves a foolish misunderstanding and a strange confusion. To *tell* something is not the same as to *cause* something, or to control or facilitate something. I am talking about

metaphysical causation, but it seems he is talking about interpersonal relationship and communication. No, God does not *tell* lies. But Scripture teaches that God *causes* people to believe lies whenever he wishes.

– M –

I would still need a refutation for that verse where the Lord told us that "when you see the fig tree you *know* that summer is near."<sup>20</sup>

If this critic limits the application of this verse to the narrow context of the passage, then it would contribute nothing to his purpose. So it is implied that he wishes to make an inference that removes the verse from its context and that is broader than the content of the verse in order to derive from it some support for empiricism.

However, it would be fallacious to infer from this verse a simplistic "I see, therefore I know" epistemology. The verse cannot logically yield this broad principle. Also, such an inference would imply that it is impossible to make a mistake, so that when I *see* water, I *know* that there is water, and that there is no such thing as a mirage. It would imply that errors and hallucinations never happen.

As I have pointed out in *Presuppositional Confrontations*, when the Bible acknowledges that someone saw something, it is not the same as affirming sensation itself as a means to knowledge.

For example, if the apostle John writes, "Peter saw the resurrected Christ," I can accept John's statement about what Peter saw without accepting sensation itself as a way to knowledge. The object of my belief is John's divinely inspired statement, not Peter's fallible sensation. In fact, Peter's sensations could be wrong in all instances but this one, and I know that he is right this time only because John infallibly (by divine inspiration) says so.

When I think that I am looking at a red car, it is possible that I am indeed looking at a red car, but it is also possible that I am dreaming, or looking at the blue sky. The problem is, how do I know in this instance whether I am indeed looking at a red car?

If God infallibly affirms that I am indeed looking at a red car, then I know that in this instance what I think I see indeed corresponds to physical reality. However, it would be fallacious to infer from this, "Therefore, knowledge is derived from sensations." No, it is God's infallible affirmation (that I am looking at a red car) that gives me the knowledge (that I am looking at a red car), and not my act of looking at the red car. That is, the sensation provides the occasion for God's infallible affirmation – it does not provide knowledge itself.

This is the kind of invalid inference that this critic has made with the statement from Jesus. That is, from an infallible but narrow and particular statement about something related to

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<sup>20</sup> See Matthew 24:32, Mark 13:28, and Luke 21:30.



seeing, he incorrectly infers that seeing itself is a reliable way to obtain knowledge.

His own philosophy denies that sensations are infallible. However, if Jesus is broadly endorsing or implying the reliability of sensations instead of making an infallible but narrow and particular judgment about something related to sensations, then how can his inference from this verse allow for errors in sensations or in inferences from sensations? The inference is not only invalid, but the conclusion is inconsistent with what this critic believes about sensations.

I affirm the words of Jesus in the verse, and not the sensations of the men. On the other hand, on the basis of this verse, this critic directly affirms the sensations of the men, infers a general support for empiricism, and then applies it to all of humanity. This is indeed a spectacular display of fallacious reasoning.

How then can he maintain that sensations are fallible? On what basis and by what standard does he affirm or reject any instance of sensation, or any inference from sensation? I know that "when you see the fig tree, you know that summer is near" is true only because Jesus said so. Those men could have been wrong about all other instances of sensations.

## 5. The Atheistic Argument from Existence<sup>21</sup>

The claim being made is that the theist, in asserting the existence of God, automatically demonstrates that he accepts the priority of existence.

Followers of Cornelius Van Til often state as their presupposition the existence of God, or the "Ontological Trinity." In contrast, I do not say that my first principle is the existence of God, but that it is the entire divine verbal revelation, which we often just call "the Bible." Gordon Clark's first principle is, "The Bible is the Word of God."

Greg Bahnsen has asserted that, when he says that his starting point is the existence of God, or the "Ontological Trinity," he means the same thing as saying that his starting point is the whole Bible. Of course, the meanings of these terms are nothing alike, and it is asking too much for people to understand "the Ontological Trinity" to mean "the whole Bible." Moreover, I am uncertain that this claim is commonly known by followers of Van Til, and it does not appear to be consistently apparent in their thinking and practice.

It is better to always say that our first principle is the Bible instead of the existence of God; that is, it is better to avoid the implication that our starting point is the bare existence of God. The difference in language between Clark and Van Til on this point is deliberate, and also reflects a difference in the clarity and substance of their thinking.

To begin from the whole Bible instead of the bare existence of God avoids many problems and difficulties. If you begin with the bare existence of God, you are not beginning with all the essential propositions in your biblical worldview, including those that are necessary to assert the existence of God in the first place, such as those that have to do with epistemology, linguistics, and so on.

Thus unless you begin with a complete worldview, and then proceed by deduction, the resulting system will always fail. For this same reason, it is futile for atheists to begin with "existence."<sup>22</sup> If they begin with bare existence, they are missing everything else, including the things that they need to assert this first proposition.

Someone once asked me how to respond if the non-Christian claims to use "logic" as his first principle. Thinking about this question will help us with our present topic.

Logic, or to be more specific, the law of non-contradiction, is indeed self-justifying in a sense – that is, in a proximate and subsidiary sense, and not an ultimate sense. This needs some explanation.

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<sup>21</sup> The following is an edited correspondence. The subject is an "argument from existence" used by some atheists. My answer is an application of what I have written in books like *Ultimate Questions* and *Apologetics in Conversation*.

<sup>22</sup> Their definition of existence begs the question, so that they cannot even start there, but we will ignore this for now.

The law of non-contradiction is self-justifying at least in the sense that it is undeniable; that is, you must affirm it to even deny it. Because of this, a non-Christian might consider it appropriate to make it the starting point of his system.

However, the law of non-contradiction cannot be a standalone first principle in a person's worldview. This is because the law itself carries no information at all, so that it is impossible to deduce any proposition from it. Since knowledge by strict deduction is no longer an option, the non-Christian must either affirm additional axioms, in which case you must critique them, or he must find some way to supply information for logic to process.

For example, if his other axioms involve intuition, then you can attack intuition as a foundation for knowledge. These other axioms must also be self-justifying, consistent with one another, and sufficient to provide an entire worldview.<sup>23</sup> Otherwise, the system fails from the start.

If the law of non-contradiction alone is his first principle, and if he does not have other axioms from intuition or some such source, then he must supply the content for his first principle to process by induction, and this probably means that he must affirm some version of empiricism. Along with this, he might also appeal to science or the scientific method.

At this point, I would challenge the opponent to rationally justify induction, empiricism, and science. Of course, he is going to say many things in an attempt to do this, but since induction, empiricism, science cannot be rationally justified, my opponent can no longer proceed. I do not have to listen to anything else that he has to say unless he gets past this point, but he will never get past this point, that is, unless I temporarily allow it for the sake of argument.

On the other hand, someone like Van Til accepted induction, empiricism, and science, only that he considered them unintelligible without the right presuppositions. This is a mistake because induction, empiricism, and science are irrational in themselves, and even the right presuppositions cannot rescue that which is inherently wrong.

There is another angle from which we can attack a non-Christian who claims the law of non-contradiction as the first principle of his worldview. That is, we can point out that any proposition implies a whole host of other propositions – it implies an entire worldview.

He might say, "Logic is axiomatic; it is self-justifying." But just to make this assertion demands an existing theory on epistemology (logic, truth, knowledge, etc.), metaphysics (he must have a theory about the nature of reality to explain the fact that he is speaking, etc.), linguistics (he is using language), and a number of other things.

This means that he can never rest after claiming "logic" as his axiom. The matter is not this simple. If you demand it from him, he must also present his view on every related subject that makes his assertion of this axiom possible in the first place. Moreover, his view on

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<sup>23</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions*.

each of these areas must be rationally defensible (you should attack him on each), and coherent (e.g. his view on linguistics must not contradict his epistemology). No non-Christian can satisfy these requirements. If you press him on it, he will never be able to get away with just saying, "Logic is my axiom, my starting point."

Even if we acknowledge that logic is self-evident, it does not help the non-Christian at all. The Christian's position is altogether different and superior. The whole Bible is his first principle from which he deduces all the necessary information for his worldview. Logic is an integral part of Scripture from the start, but it is not a standalone axiom.

The above would equally apply when a non-Christian uses "existence" as his starting point. He needs much more than just the idea of "existence" in his worldview in order to even assert "existence."

The only defensible noetic structure is deduction from a self-justifying first principle, and the only way this is possible is if the first principle contains all the necessary information to produce a complete worldview. If you do not begin with the entire revelation that God has given us, then your starting point will not have the necessary information for you to start at all. Then, you will have to depend on your sensation, your intuition, and inductive reasoning to supply your first principle with information. But then, how did you obtain this first principle? If it is by these methods (sensation, intuition, etc.), and if your first principle did not provide itself to you, then how is it first? Also, if these methods fail, and they do, then even if you are allowed to retain your narrow first principle, it is still as if you have nothing at all.

To review, in terms of the structure of a defensible biblical philosophy (we are not talking about what is metaphysically prior within the biblical worldview), God is on the same level with everything else at the top (which is the whole of revelation). Whether it is God, "existence," language, epistemology, etc., they all start at the top with the whole divine revelation as the first principle. The atheistic argument from existence starts from "existence," but atheists cannot do this unless they also have everything else that makes the assertion of existence possible. Therefore, they have accomplished nothing by this argument, and they still need to put together an entire worldview.

## 6. The Transcendental Argument for Materialism<sup>24</sup>

He said that he is going to use the transcendental argument for materialism. That is, I must use my physical mouth to say "logic." I must use my physical body to even be at the debate.

The argument would not prove materialism even if it is sound, because its conclusion falls short of materialism. Materialism affirms that physical matter is the primary or even only reality or substance, that there is no incorporeal mind or spirit. The argument does not reach this conclusion, and does not even mention or imply it.

All that this argument does is to suggest that there is a physical world and that when we speak we do so through physical bodies. This is what the argument claims, but it does not even prove this modest conclusion. It does not prove that there is a physical world. It begs the question by asserting that we must use physical bodies to speak and to be present at a debate, since it assumes without warrant that we are in a physical world instead of a purely mental world. It does not show that we think with physical brains and only with physical brains. It offers nothing to contradict my position that we think with our incorporeal minds and that brains do not "think" at all.

In my view, that there is a physical world is not a conclusion derived from sensation or intuition, but a conclusion deduced from Scripture. By "Scripture," I mean the "Word of God," or verbal revelation from the mind of God. This means that I am not mainly talking about the physical book, as in paper and ink, but the non-physical intellectual content represented by the physical book.

Of course the Bible is the Word of God, but strictly speaking, the Word of God is not physical but intellectual, since we are referring to the portion of God's mind that he has disclosed to us. If you steal my Bible and cut it up into a million pieces, you would destroy the physical book, but you would not destroy the Word of God. It is this intellectual and indestructible Word that is the first principle of my thinking.

The intellectual content of my worldview, or the Word of God, resides in Christ the divine Logos, and according to God's ordinary providence, it is directly communicated to my mind on the occasion of the visual sensations that occur when I read the Bible, but apart from the visual sensations themselves. The sensations provide the occasion for God to act on my mind, but in themselves they do not communicate any information.

This is a form of occasionalism. It is not entirely novel, but overlaps with Augustine's theory of illumination, Malebranche's "vision in God," and various forms of the "logos doctrine." Nevertheless, mine is not identical with theirs. It is more biblical in that it is consciously placed on an exegetical foundation, and it avoids the unbiblical assumptions

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<sup>24</sup> The following is an edited correspondence. It is my response to the so-called "transcendental argument for materialism."

in other versions of occasionalism. Moreover, I consistently apply it to every aspect of reality. But in fact, it is nothing other than the necessary implication of the biblical doctrine of God's providence over every detail of his creation.

I can defeat this sort of argument by proposing that we might be having the debate in a purely mental world, or in a dream. How can we know otherwise? Since my philosophy does not depend on sensation or induction, it does not damage me at all. I can use the same arguments with the same effect whether or not we are debating in the mental world or in the physical world. However, since my opponent is an empiricist or a materialist, he depends on the physical world and a physical epistemology, so that he has to first prove that we are having the debate in a physical world.

## 7. But What is Knowledge?

I deny that induction, sensation, and science can yield any knowledge, and I have provided biblical and rational justification for this in my writings. Besides the typical fallacious replies and evasions, one response is to ask, "But what is knowledge?" That is, if we cannot define knowledge, or cannot justify our definition of knowledge, then it would seem meaningless to say that induction, sensation, and science cannot yield any knowledge. This sophistry is just another evasive tactic used by those who cannot answer my arguments.

The objection misses the point. The point is that induction, sensation, and science involve fallacious processes of reasoning such that they can never discover true premises, and they can never produce logically valid conclusions from the premises. That is, it is impossible to use induction, sensation, and science to validly reason from premises X and Y to conclusion Q regarding any subject P. Thus my contention against my opponents stands even if we never define or even mention "knowledge."

Assuming the premise, "*I see* a red car," how is it possible to validly reason from this premise to, "*There is* a red car"? There must be another premise to fill in the gap between "I see" and "There is," but how is this premise to be rationally obtained and justified, rather than just stubbornly assumed? This is the point, and this is the challenge that my opponents still cannot answer.

As it stands, there is no rational difference between jumping from "I see a red car" to "There is a red car," and jumping from "I imagine a red car" or "I desire a red car" to "There is a red car." What is the rational difference between sensation, imagination, and expectation? How come one can jump from "I see" to "There is," and cannot jump from "I imagine" or "I desire" to "There is"? What is the additional premise that makes the difference? And how is this premise rationally obtained and justified? The issue is not the definition of knowledge, but the validity of the reasoning process.

The objection is sophistical and irrational. Whether or not we define knowledge, and whether or not my opponents define knowledge, the objection does nothing to justify induction, sensation, and science, but it tries to distract us from the main point, hoping that we will forget about their failure in making any process at all in establishing their case.

The objection claims that I need to define "knowledge" in a proposition such as, "Science cannot yield any knowledge." But I refuse to be bullied or distracted by sophistry. I can make the same challenge against my opponents without using the word "knowledge" at all. I challenge them to demonstrate how sensations can discover true premises. I challenge them to show how induction can validly reach conclusions that are beyond the information included in the premises. I challenge them to demonstrate how science can reach any conclusion about anything with logical validity. I challenge them to show me even one conclusion, in all of human history, that has been reached by sensation, induction, and science with logical validity.

I can continue to press my challenge against induction, sensation, and science without using the word "knowledge." For example, I say that science cannot validly deduce or infer anything because it commits the logical fallacy of affirming the consequent. I am making the same point when I say that science cannot yield any knowledge.

Although I can define knowledge and use the word to issue the challenge, if I were to do it in this context, my opponents would probably continue their policy of evasion and attempt to dispute my definition. But I refuse to allow intellectual tricksters to bully or distract me. The real issue is how they can use induction, sensation, and science to validly reason from premises to conclusion about anything at all.



## 8. Where is the Refutation?

This critic attacked your position on sensation, but I think some of the things that he said were already answered by you in your articles. I am not sure if he reads them.

My existing publications constitute a definitive response to all criticisms found anywhere written by anyone on this subject. I am confident that they are accurate and irrefutable, and there is no pressure is constantly writing new materials in response to criticisms. People can write all sorts of things against anything, but not every attempted refutation is logically sound or successful.

Many people are affected by the most recent things that they read, and so when they read my writings, they are swayed by them, but then when they read an attempted refutation, they change and think that I am wrong. Then, I offer my response and they seem to be convinced again. Thus they are tossed back and forth between differing positions, and never attain intellectual stability.

There are at least two reasons for this problem.

First, my position is widely disliked, and I am able to convince anyone only by the sheer biblical and rational force of my arguments. On the other hand, most people favor some version of empiricism even without any persuasion, and even if they are initially awakened from their empirical slumber by my writings, it is easy for them to be swayed back to empiricism by even the flimsiest arguments, or even just a rhetorical question. That is, they will take any excuse to stay with what they already prefer to believe.

Second, many readers fail to apply strict standards of rationality when they examine arguments and refutations. They fail to remember that not just any complaint is a valid refutation. Just like any sound argument, a refutation must have a conclusion validly deduced from true premises, and that contradicts its opponent's position. My critics have not written anything that amounts to this. They give assertions, speculations, rhetorical questions, but no arguments that reason from true premises to necessary conclusions. Moreover, they have not written anything that proves empiricism. Even if they successfully refute me, they would end up with nothing more than skepticism.

## 9. The Incoherence of Empiricism

There is an argument claiming that the proposition, "All knowledge comes from biblical propositions and their necessary implications,"<sup>25 26</sup> is incoherent because it is not itself a biblical proposition, and it cannot be deduced from biblical propositions. Therefore, if one accepts this proposition, one should reject this proposition.

However, it is indeed possible to deduce this proposition from Scripture. The Bible teaches that God is infallible, that the Bible is his infallible revelation, that God controls all things, that man is fallible, that man's sensations and intuitions are fallible, etc., etc. – the proposition is readily deduced from these premises.

Thus the only thing that the objection accomplishes is to show us that the critics lack the ability to perform the most simple and obvious deductions.

On the other hand, think about empiricism. It is often assumed that sensation is a reliable way to obtain knowledge, but consider just several of the problems connected to empiricism and science:

1. If empiricism is rational, then it should be possible to demonstrate its rationality by a valid process of reasoning. What is this process of reasoning? And is it really valid?
2. If empiricism necessarily uses induction, then how can it avoid the logical problems that come with induction?

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<sup>25</sup> This is considered a tenet of "Scripturalism." The term refers to the philosophy of Gordon Clark. Although it is often applied to my philosophy, I do not embrace the term. The first principle of Clark's philosophy is, in fact, not that all knowledge comes from the Bible, but that the Bible is the word of God.

<sup>26</sup> I am consistent in the contexts in which I make this claim, or a claim like this, although I do not always point out the contexts. That is, the contexts always relate to a *public* philosophy, such as in debates, in writing out a system of theology or philosophy, and so on. When it comes to articulating a biblical view of philosophy or apologetics, especially when it comes to epistemology, we are concerned with the discovery and justification of true propositions, as well as the refutation of all opposing propositions. This is mainly done in a public setting, that is, public in the sense of something presented or projected outside of one's mind, as in a conversation or a publication. For example, I claim that the Christian faith is true. How do I respond when this claim is challenged? How do I articulate a coherent, comprehensive, and justified philosophy in which this claim is true? How do I show that I am right, and how do I show that the non-Christian is wrong? That is the issue, and when that is the issue, I have stated that there is really no justification to knowledge except divine revelation, which in our context is represented by the Bible. In connection with this, I often use the word "revelation" instead of "the Bible" to imply that knowledge is in fact derived from something that *could be* larger than the Bible. Information that God will show us in heaven, that is not already in the Bible, would be knowledge that we derive from non-biblical revelation. I never claimed that the Bible contains *all* the knowledge there is available to men in all contexts and forever. Again, we can certainly receive knowledge that is not recorded in the Bible when we are in heaven. Although all knowledge that we will receive in heaven will be in perfect agreement with the revelation that we already have, we will indeed have access to more knowledge, knowledge that is not in the Bible. I am not so stupid as to deny this, and my critics should not be so stupid as to think that I deny this.

3. If empiricism is the very foundation of science, then how can science be considered eminently rational when they have yet to defend empiricism?
4. Then, how about the fact that the scientific method, by its very own nature, commits the fallacy of affirming the consequent in every experiment?

Anyone who decries my opposition to empiricism must show how he can know anything by sensation by his partially or totally empirical epistemology.

He cannot prove it by "pure reason," since logic by itself carries no content from which he can derive a proof for empiricism. And to use intuition as a foundation for sensation would require a proof for intuition as a way to knowledge, as well as a proven standard to determine which instance of intuition is correct.

Some Christian empiricists claim that Scripture provides the preconditions for empiricism, or that it provides the presuppositions that account for or justify empiricism. Scripture indeed provides the preconditions for us to understand that empiricism is irrational and false, but it does not provide rational justification to say that empiricism is true. An appeal has been made to Matthew 24:32, but I have shown that it cannot produce an "I see, therefore I know" epistemology. And Matthew 24:32 is not the only verse in the Bible. How about John 12:28-29 and 2 Kings 3:16-24?

If Scripture shows only one instance in which sensation is not reliable, then at least we need a reliable standard or method by which we can tell which instance of sensation is reliable. What is this standard or method? And is this standard or method really reliable? If they claim that one sensation verifies another one, then this begs the question, since we do not know which one is right, and maybe both are wrong.

It does not matter how many biblical passages they twist and abuse for their purpose, for as long as there is even one verse in Scripture that suggests the fallibility of sensation, we are taken right back to the question of a standard and method by which we can tell which instance is reliable.

Some of those who claim to affirm a form of "presuppositional apologetics" have been so obsessed with arguing against my opposition to empiricism that it is as if they are now defending empiricism, and in a manner that often contradicts what they would say when they argue against classical and evidential apologetics. As they attack an opposition to empiricism, have they justified empiricism? How have they done this? And if empiricism is part of their epistemology, then they must first justify empiricism before attacking an opposition to empiricism; otherwise, they are just arguing in a circle while standing on thin air.

If they claim that a person must rely on his physical sensations to read the Bible, and that the words of the Bible are conveyed to the mind through the physical sensations themselves, and if they also admit that sensations are fallible, then whether or not the Bible is infallible immediately becomes irrelevant for them, since they can never have an infallible Bible in practice. This is because the Bible in effect will only be as reliable to them as their sensations.

Even if I allow them to believe that sensations are generally reliable, it is still irrelevant until they can show me how reliable they are, and even more importantly, how they know in which instances they are correct. If one cannot show me in which instances the sensations or the inferences from sensations are correct, then in effect they are never reliable, since there is no way to distinguish truth from error.

Some of them claim that the Bible teaches that God has created man in a way that he can use his senses to gain some knowledge, even if the sensations are fallible. There are at least two problems with this:

1. They claim that they must rely on their sensations to read the Bible in the first place, so how can they trust what they think they have read from the Bible about their sensations without first proving the reliability of sensation? They argue in a circle.
2. The Bible provides many examples showing that the senses are fallible, that they are often deceived. So even if we forget about the previous point, there is still no way for them to tell which instances of sensations are reliable, and so they have made no progress.

Thus it is really their view that is incoherent, because they cannot know that their sensations are reliable by their sensations. On the other hand, we bypass all of these difficulties when we begin from the mind of God and not the sensation of man.

They sometimes exclaim that if we do not depend on our sensations, then we cannot know anything. But this complaint does nothing to prove empiricism, and therefore does nothing to show that it is the way out of skepticism. In contrast, we affirm that revelation is the sure and only way out of skepticism. We do not regard the Bible as nothing, but to begin with it is to build upon a foundation of vast wisdom and knowledge.

## 10. The Fatal Maneuver

There is a fatal maneuver in debate where if you can show that your opponent's position contradicts itself or makes itself impossible, then you have effectively destroyed his position and all that follows from it. It is a powerful move. It checkmates your opponent. However, if it is illegitimately used, it can backfire and inflict a fatal blow against the position of the one who uses it.

My system of philosophy and method of apologetics is rightly called "biblical" or "presuppositional." I begin with revelation and deduce the rest of the system from it. From this basic principle, the system can be adapted to respond to any objection as well as to destroy any opposing system. The system is constructed upon revelation and then uses deduction to derive the information inherent in revelation. From the start, it excludes irrational and impossible epistemologies such as those that place any reliance on intuition and sensation.

One prominent school of "presuppositional" apologetics protests that this surely goes too far. It admits that induction is fallacious, at least on its own, but then it is somehow redeemed when we operate under biblical presuppositions. It admits that sensation cannot yield knowledge, at least by itself, but then it can function as a reliable way to acquire knowledge once biblical principles are assumed. Or, it says that the unbeliever can use induction and sensation with good effect, but only that he cannot "account" for this. I have already critiqued this incoherent and unbiblical school of apologetics in a number of places, and it is not my main purpose to do it again here. But for the rest of this discussion, we need to keep in mind that its adherents have never shown *that* or *how* biblical presuppositions can make what is inherently irrational and illogical become rational and logical. It is just an unjustified assertion on their part.

Yet my point concerns something else, and that is how this school of apologetics attempts to refute mine, and how this backfires against them. One frequent objection is that if we must begin from the Bible, then surely we must first use our senses to even read the Bible. I have already answered this several times in several places, and there has been no successful attempt at a rebuttal. Among other things, this objection begs the question, and really ignores my position in the first place. This is because if I am correct, then we really *do not* need to use our senses (in the sense intended by my opponents) to read the Bible. I could respond to the objection just like I could to any empirical atheist — I could push the debate into a purely mental world (as in a dream) just by suggesting it. From there, I can re-establish the physical world by my first principle, but what has happened to the empiricist, whether Christian or not?

Because I have answered the objection, it has failed to damage me. However, now that my opponents have stated the objection, and stated it as something that is consistent with *their* position, then *they* must answer it themselves. Because they have stated that one *must* use his senses to know what the Bible says, now they must show either that our senses are

infallible, or if our senses are fallible, that there is an infallible way of telling in which instances they are correct and in which instances they are incorrect. If they cannot do this, then *they* cannot read the Bible, so that their entire system — their whole *Christian faith* — collapses, and it does so just as easily as empirical atheism, or any non-Christian religion or philosophy.

Some of them try to justify sensation as a reliable way to obtain knowledge. To argue for empiricism apart from Scripture is impossible, and they acknowledge this. And so, seemingly consistent with their own position, they argue for the basic reliability of sensation from Scripture. But what would it take to establish their position from Scripture? They acknowledge that our senses are fallible, and so they are not interested in supporting empiricism by arguing that the senses are infallible. However, if the senses are fallible, then they must establish from Scripture an *infallible* method by which to distinguish instances in which the senses are correct and instances in which they are wrong. But if they have a method at all, and if their method is fallible, then we still need to infallibly know *how* fallible it is and *when* it is fallible; otherwise, the whole thing collapses into skepticism again. They have not even come close to establishing any of this. At best, they have only shown that the sensation of a given biblical character was accurate in a particular instance, because the Bible reveals that it was accurate in that particular instance. For all we know, that person never had another accurate sensation again. So they need much more than this. What they need (but fail to provide) is a theory of epistemology concerning sensation that applies to the people and experiences that are not already described in the Bible.

Because they insist on empiricism but fail to justify it, then by applying the objection against me, they have completely shut *themselves* out of the Bible. In attempting to perform a fatal maneuver against my position, they have killed their own. In fact, unless they can answer their own objection, they cannot even have an objection against me, since according to them, they would need the reliability of the senses to even read or hear about my position in the first place. Therefore, if I were to take their position seriously, I would have to say that their *entire* system falls apart, that there is no way they could know *anything* that is in the Bible, that they have never heard the gospel, and so that they cannot even be Christians at all. But since I do not take them seriously, and since I can explain their lives with my position, I can be more charitable to them than their own position allows.

As it is, any non-Christian can confront adherents of this school of apologetics and apparently bring down the entire Christian system using only this point. It is true that most non-Christians will not do this, because most non-Christians have empiricism as an integral part of their belief systems, so that they will usually not attack what they themselves believe. However, if a non-Christian finds himself backed into a corner, he can always bring this up to ensure mutual destruction. Thus I declare that this other school of presuppositional apologetics a complete failure. To the extent that it adheres to Scripture in its various parts, of course it is superior to non-Christian systems, but this is irrelevant in the construction of a philosophy since it fails at the very beginning, so that it cannot even get to those scriptural parts, and if non-Christians ever awake to this, it will prove to be a total disaster for these believers in debate and evangelism.

If anyone disagrees with the above, let him prove — not just assert — how by sensation he manages to read even one word from the Bible. Logically demonstrate how it happens — establish every premise and show that every step proceeds by necessary inference — and I will concede the whole debate on this issue. Anything else that you say is irrelevant — you have asserted the necessity of sensation, as something that you need even before you read the Bible, so now you must establish it.

If you are unable to do this but insist on holding to your position, then let me offer you one piece of advice. You might never encounter a non-Christian who will challenge the reliability of sensation, but if you ever run into someone who does, know that the answer is to reject sensation and stand on revelation alone. Many people are interested in defending an idol theologian, but I am interested in the cause of Christ. I cannot stop you if you must remain in your false and dishonest position because of your loyalty to a particular personality or school of thought. But remember what I am telling you. One day you might need it. Not every non-Christian that you debate will give you the same pass on this issue that you give to yourself.

Then, there is another objection that has to do with my view on divine sovereignty, and how it relates to metaphysics and epistemology. I affirm that God must be active in facilitating and controlling all human thoughts, whether true or false, biblical or heretical. The adherents of this other school of presuppositional apologetics once again try to perform a fatal maneuver against me. They suggest that according to my view, I could be deceived in affirming my view. First, this is just outright stupid, since the Bible says that God can send evil spirits to convince people of error. So no matter *how* it happens, God is the one who decrees that someone would be deceived. Second, they demonstrate that they really have no idea how to perform this fatal maneuver, since it again backfires against them. If I am deceived *in the way* that the objection suggests (that is, by my own explanation of how one comes to believe falsehood), then it actually proves my position. If I am deceived *in the way* that I say one is deceived, then I am in fact not deceived. To illustrate, if God sends a demon to "deceive" someone into thinking that God does not send demons to deceive, then God *does* send demons to deceive. Likewise, if God causes me to believe the "falsehood" that it is God who causes one to believe falsehood, then God *does* cause one to believe falsehood, and I am in fact not deceived. In other words, my position cannot be demonstrated as self-refuting in the manner attempted by the objection.

The fatal maneuver of showing self-contradiction in your opponent's position can be a powerful and effective move in debate. Just make sure that the opponent's position is *in fact* self-refuting and that your objection does not backfire against you. See to it that this fatal maneuver is not fatal just for you. Of course, if it can backfire to show incoherence in your own position, then your position is wrong and not worth defending in the first place, as the above have shown.

And if you still disagree, here is another exercise. Show this article to any non-Christian with more than a sixth grade education and tell him to apply what he reads here. Now see if you can still defend your faith against him using your brand of "presuppositional" apologetics.

## 11. Fallacies, and Fallacies upon Fallacies<sup>27</sup>

From what I can tell this critic fails to note what your position really is. He assumes that it means propositions found only in the Bible are true and constitute knowledge – they exclude what is deduced as knowledge because they say that "knowledge by deduction" cannot be found in the Bible.

Logically speaking, the implications of biblical propositions are not additions to the biblical propositions, since all the implications of any proposition are inherent in the proposition.

So it is a strange objection to say that we cannot be correct or coherent because we also affirm what is necessarily deduced from biblical propositions. I have never restricted myself to the biblical propositions apart from their necessary implications, nor do I need to, since all the implications of the biblical propositions are inherent in the biblical propositions. What is validly or necessarily deduced from revealed propositions is equally certain as what is explicitly revealed.

Then, although I affirm that only the biblical propositions and their implications are infallible, I never said that these are the only propositions by which I function. Instead, I entertain many extra-biblical propositions in my daily thinking and living – nevertheless, only as opinion, not infallible revealed information. This allows me to function and discuss many things just as others do, only that I make a clear distinction between fallible opinion and infallible revelation, and I never elevate opinion to the level of revelation.

When it comes to apologetics, my opinion is not my religion, so it is not what I defend. Therefore, it is no problem for me to acknowledge that I hold to some things as my fallible opinion, but that when it comes to my biblical faith, I hold to it as infallible revelation.

On the other hand, the critics' standard for considering something as "knowledge" or reliable information is very low and irrational, and so many things are considered knowledge or reliable information even when they lack rational justification, and that are really mere opinion and guesswork. The result is that their belief systems are mixtures of uncertainty and confusion, and their irrational epistemology corrodes almost every part of their noetic structure.

This critic opposes my affirmation that man's innate knowledge has enough content and is specific enough that it corresponds only to the biblical worldview and excludes all others. He thinks that this is a mere assertion, and that this cannot be derived from Romans 1 and 2.

But Romans 1 says that this innate knowledge contains information about God's attributes, such as his eternity and power, and it is specific enough to condemn all idolatry and even something like homosexuality. Then, Romans 2 says that the moral laws have been written

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<sup>27</sup> The following includes an edited correspondence.



in the minds of men, and this information is full and specific enough to either condemn or excuse many of their daily actions.

This is a lot of specific information! Since this innate knowledge is full enough to condemn everyone who does not worship the *Christian* God or obey the *Christian* God's moral laws, it necessarily follows that it is full enough to exclude all non-Christian ideas of God, and all non-Christian concepts of morality.

Of course, this still does not offer any information on how one might receive salvation, but it is enough to condemn all non-Christians. To oppose this is also to say that man's innate knowledge is sufficient to exclude many *but not all* religions, so that if God condemns the adherents of these religions that are not excluded by man's innate knowledge, it could not be on the basis of man's innate knowledge. However, this view (a necessary implication of denying my position) directly contradicts Paul's point in Romans 1 and 2.

The critic also fails to state and support his own positive construction, his own epistemology and philosophy, although he needs this to challenge me. If he opposes my occasionalism and my opposition to empiricism, then what is his epistemology, and how is it rationally justified? How can *he* read my books and then criticize them?

He cannot just criticize my epistemology without having his own, and he must be able to justify his own before he criticizes mine.<sup>28</sup> This is because his criticisms must themselves have their basic presuppositions – he must have something to stand on when he attacks me, and he must have something with which to attack. This would not be true if we were to have the same basic presuppositions, but disagree only on the subsidiary details – in that case, he might not have to present a positive construction and be able to defend it, but in this case, he must, since our basic presuppositions disagree.

Logically speaking, until my critics (those who affirm some kind of empiricism) irrefutably justify the use of sensation as a means to knowledge, they cannot even begin to oppose me. They can know nothing – they cannot even read the Bible, because they say that they depend on their sensations to read it, but they have not explained how they can validly derive knowledge from their sensations.

It is futile to claim, as many of these critics do, that biblical presuppositions provide the sufficient preconditions to derive knowledge by sensation. It is true that biblical presuppositions are required to render even errors intelligible in the first place, but errors are still errors, only now we can intelligibly think of them as errors. This is also why I can intelligibly think of empiricism as fallacious. Biblical presuppositions cannot change irrationality into rationality; they can only make irrationality intelligible as irrationality.

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<sup>28</sup> I do not necessarily mean "before" in the chronological sense, but at least in the logical sense. In other words, he must have a rational justification for his epistemology at least in his mind, ready to be articulated and defended at any time, before he criticizes my epistemology. Otherwise, rationally speaking, he cannot even know about my epistemology, since he has no positive and defensible epistemology of his own by which he knows about mine.

## 12. Invincibility, Irrefutability, and Infallibility

You always claim that your writings are invincible. I am not even saying I disagree with you, but sometimes you come off kind of strong, maybe a little too strong. Could not your writings contain errors?

Perhaps there is a misunderstanding as to precisely what I am claiming and about what I am making the claim, and there seems to be some confusion about the meanings and implications of invincibility, irrefutability, and infallibility.

I do claim that some of my writings are invincible and irrefutable. But most of them are in agreement with many other theologians, so that in those cases, especially when their arguments are similar, I would just as readily affirm that they are also invincible and irrefutable.

For example, I would affirm that Martin Luther on divine sovereignty, Charles Hodge on justification by faith, Robert Reymond on the deity of Christ, and many other theologians on many other topics, are invincible and irrefutable. They have correctly built their arguments for these doctrines from Scripture, and Scripture is invincible and irrefutable. So when I claim that I am invincible and irrefutable on certain points, I am not claiming something that is exclusive to me.

This is different from claiming infallibility. Take my claim that my apologetic method is invincible and irrefutable. To say that a certain apologetic method is invincible and irrefutable is different from saying that the person is infallible, and that a person is fallible does not mean that he is wrong all the time. It is possible for me to write " $1 + 1 = 2$ " a hundred times in an essay without making a mistake, and this essay would indeed be invincible and irrefutable (even if not very interesting), but this does not mean that I am infallible as a person.

I come off strong because, at the risk of being misinterpreted as arrogant, I wish to impart my confidence in Scripture to people. And I repeatedly remind the readers that I am so sure only because my own confidence is derived from the infallibility of Scripture. So I am not going to undermine my own materials by adopting a false humility, even if it would be more socially acceptable.

Christians so rarely witness any faith in their leaders that when one comes out and shows it, everybody thinks that he is being arrogant. But their minds have been captured by a non-Christian standard. If the Christians cannot claim invincibility and irrefutability because of the Scripture's infallibility, then the non-Christians will always have a place to stand in the intellectual realm. But on the authority of Scripture and in the name of Christ, I allow the unbelievers no such place to stand.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> This is also related to why I use biblical invectives when describing the foolishness and depravity of the unbelievers. I wish to pass on the sharp biblical contrasts between light and darkness, wisdom and folly,

If something is true and you affirm it, then you must be right on that point. If you are not sure that something is true, then do not say it, and there is no problem. Too many theologians and preachers say, "This *must* be true...but I could be wrong." This is not humble, but stupid. Do not be fooled by the constant self-abasement practiced by some people. It might be that they are in fact humble individuals, but on the other hand, they might just be spineless losers. They make an uncertain sound, and the people who hear them become confused and hesitant rather than focused and militant.<sup>30</sup>

I have never claimed to be infallible, only that my method of apologetics is invincible (it will always defeat the opponent) and irrefutable (it cannot be defeated by any opponent). And it is invincible and irrefutable because it is biblical and rational. Again, a general invincibility and irrefutability is different from infallibility or absolute perfection, and I have never claimed to be infallible or perfect.

This also applies to other Christians when they speak from Scripture. If you were to write an essay showing from the Bible that Christ is God, then you *better* claim invincibility and irrefutability. Some things are just *right*, and you ought to know it and claim it, and then pass on this confidence to others.

That said, there are a number of things that I am uncertain about. And if you will go through my writings, you will find that I qualify those statements with words like "maybe," "probably," "it is possible," "it is my opinion," and so forth.

Sometimes, I am uncertain about some things because I am being consistent with my epistemology, so that I will not claim more certainty than what is rationally warranted. At other times, I am uncertain because I have not yet thoroughly studied and considered the relevant arguments, so that I am unwilling to take a definite position. Moreover, there are some things that I refrain from mentioning altogether because I am not yet certain about the correct position; meanwhile, I continue to spend time researching those topics.

In fact, I qualify many statements regarding things for which other people would claim certainty based on their false epistemology, but my standard is much higher. This also means that when I declare that a given position is invincible and irrefutable, I have already applied a much greater skepticism against the position than any of my critics and opponents could ever muster.

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and so on. Most of the invectives that I use are either directly taken from Scripture, or are derived from Scripture.

<sup>30</sup> To illustrate, one can lose more faith listening to William Lane Craig defend the faith than one might gain. He makes his own arguments sound so uncertain. Everything is soft and merely probable, but nothing is certain, nothing is absolute and irrefutable. This is not humble – it is just pathetic.

### 13. Excluded by Necessity

My friend has asked one of the most commonly raised objections to Christianity, and I have soberly realized that since I never took the time to read through any critiques of this argument, I find myself unprepared to answer him.

His simple objection is this: Why does the Christian God have to be the one true God, and not the God of any other religion? I realize I could go through and point out the insufficiencies of each major religion's god, but is there also a way to positively demonstrate Christianity's sole claim to truth?

For any true proposition, there is literally an infinite number of possible errors related to it or possible deviations from it. For example, if " $1 + 1 = 2$ " is true, then the possible errors or deviations would include  $1 + 1 = 3, 4, 5, \dots, n$ . Therefore, it is impossible to make a specific refutation of every possible error or deviation from the truth. Instead, what we need is a positive claim or argument that excludes all errors or deviations by logical necessity.

If Christianity (the Bible) is true, and this same Christianity declares that all non-Christian claims and worldviews are false, then all non-Christian claims and worldviews are false by logical necessity.

Now, to eliminate all non-Christian claims and worldviews by logical necessity would demand that your positive demonstration be correct by logical necessity. Supposing that we have such an apologetic, the situation would be thus:

1. Christianity is true by logical necessity.
2. Christianity excludes all non-Christian views.
3. Therefore, all non-Christian views are false by logical necessity.

The key is (1) – the rest are easy and automatic. And to attain (1), you will have to read my works on apologetics and learn how to apply the method. I recommend reading *Ultimate Questions*, *Presuppositional Confrontations*, and *Apologetics in Conversation*, among others.

Then, this forces your opponent to interact with the Christian's positive construction, rather than allowing him to evade the force of your presentation just by throwing mere possibilities at you – since you have destroyed those possibilities, not by specific refutations, but by logical necessity. If you are dealing with a specific non-Christian worldview, you might also perform a refutation of this particular belief system.

## 14. God is Logic<sup>31</sup>

I am presently having a discussion about God and logic. One premise has been made that "God = logic" and "logic = God." From your viewpoint, is this a valid premise? Or is it better stated, "God is logical"?

To give a little context, we are discussing the Trinity and the dual nature of Christ as God and man, and how these doctrines are logical.

One person has said, "I would disagree with the statement that God is logic. This is contrary to biblical revelation. Logic has as its target a truth statement. It is important to recognize that logic is a tool, not truth."

There are different senses in which we may use the word "logic," and when considering this question, we should specify the meaning.

It is wrong to flatly say that "God is Logic" is contrary to biblical revelation, because John 1:1 says that Christ is the "Logos," which is just as easily translated "Reason" or "Logic." In fact, in the context of this verse, which presents Christ as the true "Logos," or the principle of rationality that structures, regulates, and upholds all things, "Reason" is probably the superior translation.

Therefore, in this sense, it is true that "God is Logic." However, we are using the word in a personal or personified sense. "Logic" or "Reason" in this sense is a person, and includes intellectual content (all that God knows). The emphasis, then, is on the rationality of Christ the Logos – that all things are consistent in his mind and his works, that he structures, regulates, and upholds all things in accordance with his perfect rationality.

We often use the word "logic" in a narrower sense – as in the "laws of logic." I would not say that God is the laws of logic; rather, the relation between God and the laws of logic is that these laws are descriptions of the way that God thinks and operates.

When we are using the word in this sense, then "logic" is indeed void of content; however, they are still not mere "tools." When we think logically (in accordance with the laws of logic), we are not using mere "tools" of thought, as if they are detached and independent from the mind of God, but we are imitating the way God thinks and operates. To call the laws of logic mere tools might convey the idea that they are something that God has merely given or even invented for us to use, but they are necessary rules of thought that we must follow in order to imitate God's pattern of thinking and acting.

The above distinction between the personal and impersonal senses can be expressed simply by capitalizing the words "logic" and "reason" when we are using them in the personal sense. This is why I use the word "Reason" in my writings when referring to Christ the Logos.

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<sup>31</sup> For more on this, see the chapter "Jesus and Reason" in Vincent Cheung, *The View from Above*.

## 15. Christ the Reason<sup>32</sup>

I came across today a letter written by Greg Bahnsen regarding some issues he had with John Robbins.

At one point, Bahnsen says, regarding Clark, "Who can forget his exegetically atrocious rendition of John 1:1 ('In the beginning was Logic')?" Why does he say this? Does he think that "In the beginning was Logic" is a wrong translation? If so, why?

I thought you, Clark, Bahnsen, and Robbins were all in agreement on that verse. Any help that you can offer to clear this up would be helpful.

Bahnsen disagreed with translating "logos" as "Logic" in this verse. Clark was right and Bahnsen was wrong. Depending on the context, "logos" can be translated by a number of English words, such as "word," "speech," "proposition," "sentence," "reason," "logic," and several others.

John 1:1 refers to the pre-existence of Christ the Logos, and his relation to God the Father and to creation. It is possible that John is declaring that Christ is the fulfillment of the Logos of Greek philosophy – that is, the principle of Reason that structures and regulates the whole universe. Of course, John is not saying that Christ and the Greek Logos are the same thing, but it is possible that he is taking the word or concept to fill it with Christian meaning.

Or, as some say, John has in mind the Wisdom of Jewish literature. But this makes no difference to our question. Then, some say that John is advancing a Christian concept that cannot be absolutely traced to a Jewish or Greek background. This also makes no difference to the view that Christ is Reason. It remains that John 1 declares that he is the creator and sustainer of the universe. That said, "Reason" and "Logic" are probably superior translations to "Word." At least we can say they are not wrong translations. Sometimes I refer to "Reason" with a capital "R" in my writings. And when I do, this is what I have in mind. I am speaking of Christ, who is Reason personified – to reject him is to reject rationality itself.

There is no legitimate exegetical reason to forbid translating "logos" as "Reason" or "Logic" in John 1:1. People shrink back from it probably due to an anti-intellectual prejudice.

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<sup>32</sup> For more on this, see the chapter "Jesus and Reason" in Vincent Cheung, *The View from Above*.

## 16. Man's Innate Knowledge<sup>33</sup>

I affirm that man has an innate knowledge of God, with enough clarity and content that he has no excuse to deny or disobey God. However, I deny that a system of theology can be founded on or derived from our innate knowledge of God. To say it another way, I deny that our innate knowledge of God can be the first principle of a biblical worldview – there is insufficient content, clarity, and objectivity, among other reasons.

This is why I never appeal to intuition to justify any part of my theology or to perform apologetics. An accurate understanding of the content and the extent of our innate knowledge of God comes from verbal revelation in the first place. In other words, although I affirm that we have an innate knowledge of God, we do not base our faith and assurance or our theology and apologetics on this innate knowledge; rather, we must base these things on verbal revelation.

I indeed refer to man's innate knowledge in my writings, but I never do this as if the truth of Christianity rests on this as its foundation, or as if this innate knowledge is itself proof that Christianity is true. Otherwise, this would become an appeal to man's intuition, and the argument would become subjective. Rather, I appeal to this innate knowledge only to explain why biblical presuppositions are not denied in practice but are implicitly assumed even by unbelievers, and to explain in what sense we have common ground or a point of contact with the unbelievers when preaching the gospel to them.

I affirm that Scripture is logically undeniable, but when I say that man's innate knowledge is undeniable the emphasis is not on the *logical* undeniability of Scripture, but I mean that some core biblical premises cannot be denied *in practice* despite the unbelievers' claim to the contrary. Thus we refer to man's innate knowledge not to prove Scripture – rather, it is Scripture that proves the innate knowledge – but only to explain why we can communicate with unbelievers.

When we are speaking of the innate knowledge of God in the context of apologetics, we are considering the *strategic* aspect of apologetics, and not the strictly *rational* aspect. That the Scripture is logically undeniable is demonstrated by engaging the contents of Scripture itself, and not man's innate knowledge.

Some people fail to note this distinction in my writings, or mistakenly think that I fail to make this distinction, so they falsely accuse me of being incoherent on this point, as if I reject intuition as a foundation for knowledge but then appeal to it anyway. Rather, in my system of theology and apologetics, if not for the fact that Scripture teaches it, I can throw out man's innate knowledge and it will remain essentially unaffected, since it does not depend on man's innate knowledge, although some practical adjustments will be needed.

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<sup>33</sup> The following is an edited response to a question. For more about man's innate knowledge of God, and its implications and uses, see Vincent Cheung *Systematic Theology, Ultimate Questions*, and *Presuppositional Confrontations*.

Sinners suppress this innate knowledge of God that is written on every man's heart. Although it is suppressed to the point of being denied, it is still called knowledge. The explanation is that just because a person knows something does not mean that he consciously thinks about it all the time. However, if a person knows something, it implies that it can be recalled.

This has similarities to what people mean when they refer to "repressed" memory, although I am wary of the implications that can come from using the word. Scripture teaches that sinners know God in their minds, but they have, in a morally culpable way, suppressed or repressed this knowledge.

In regeneration and conversion, the elect sinner is awakened from his intellectual and moral slumber, and into the light of Christ and Truth: "But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you'" (Ephesians 5:13–14).



## 17. Common Ground

I am interested in a point that you put forth in your book, *Presuppositional Confrontations*. My hope is that you will further expound upon it for me:

"The real common ground that the Christian has with the non-Christian is that they are both made in the image of God. However, the non-Christian suppresses and denies this common ground in his explicit philosophy. Therefore, in terms of our explicit philosophies, there is no common ground between the Christian and the non-Christian. But the knowledge of God is inescapable, and surfaces in distorted form at various points of the non-Christian's philosophy. Thus the Christian argues that the non-Christian already knows about the true God and denies it, which means that the non-Christian is without excuse and subject to condemnation."

We must not say that there is absolutely no common ground between believers and unbelievers. If we have absolutely no common ground with non-Christians, then they would not even be human. However, we have at least the image of God in common with them, and also the universal and inescapable innate knowledge about God and his moral laws.

Since unbelievers have an innate knowledge of God, so that they already know some true propositions about God, then there is common ground between believers and unbelievers at least in this sense. However, since unbelievers suppress their innate knowledge about God, so that they deny what they know about God in their explicit philosophy, we can say that there is no explicit common ground between believers and unbelievers.

There is no explicit agreement between Christian and non-Christian philosophy. This position is opposed to classical and evidential apologetics, which say that believers and unbelievers have in common even some of their essential presuppositions, so that the unbelievers do not need to reject their basic principles to reach God, and that they only need to reason more accurately on the basis of these principles.

However, there is in fact zero common ground in our explicit philosophy, because even something like " $1 + 1 = 2$ " means something different to me than to an unbeliever. I think of it in relation to God, but the unbeliever does not. Therefore, " $1 + 1 = 2$ " is a shorthand for something that has different meanings and implications for the believers and unbelievers.

In other words, even when the believer and unbeliever appear to agree on a proposition, they in fact disagree, since their basic presuppositions are different and opposed, such that the proposition in fact means something different to the believer than it does to the unbeliever. In this sense, there is no common ground between the two, so that an unbeliever must renounce his basic principles to convert to the truth. This is a necessary part of repentance.

## 18. Axiom and Proof<sup>34</sup>

The significance of man's innate knowledge of God has to do with how we can have any common point of reference with the unbelievers, so that we can communicate with them, and press them concerning the fact that they implicitly acknowledge biblical premises even though they explicitly deny them. It is not strictly related to the self-justifying nature of biblical revelation. That is, even if man has no innate knowledge of God, the Bible would still be objectively true and self-justifying, since it is a revelation from God.

As for how a first principle can be self-justifying, let us take the law of non-contradiction as an illustration. This law is self-justifying in the sense that it is logically undeniable – you must affirm it in an attempt to deny it. However, as a *first principle* it would be insufficient, because it does not contain any information, including the information that you need to know about the law in the first place. That is, among other things, it lacks a theory of epistemology.

When I say that a first principle must have the content to justify itself, I mean that it must supply all the necessary information – on metaphysics, epistemology, linguistics, ethics, etc. – otherwise, the first principle itself would not have enough information to make itself possible. The content of our first principle is the Bible, and it is systematized in Christian theology. This in turn is the intellectual basis upon which we think about the world and interact with unbelievers.

Gordon Clark says that every system must begin from an "unprovable" axiom or first principle. This is true, but you must not misunderstand what this means. *By definition* a "proof" entails reasoning to a conclusion from previous premises. If there is a "proof" for a first principle, then it would not in fact be *first*, since it would be a conclusion derived from previous premises, and it would self-contradictory to call it a "first" principle.<sup>35</sup>

Thus Clark is right about this, but because many people do not use this technical definition for "proof," when they hear that a first principle is "unprovable," they tend to think that this means it is arbitrary, or that there is no rational defense for it. For this reason, although the fault rests with the people who fail to appreciate the meaning of the word, I avoid calling the Christian first principle "unprovable" in an attempt to prevent this misunderstanding.

Clark indeed affirms that we can defend the Christian first principle, but not by what is called a proof. For example, in *A Christian View of Men and Things*, he shows how a comprehensive and coherent intellectual system can be deduced from our first principle, and he also shows how non-Christian principles have failed. We can also demonstrate the self-justifying and undeniable nature of our first principle, and how it logically excludes all others. Our starting point is therefore rational and necessary, and not arbitrary.

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<sup>34</sup> The following is an edited response to a question about the nature of first principles.

<sup>35</sup> The same applies to the words "indemonstrable" and "demonstration."

## 19. Protecting Your Faith<sup>36</sup>

When I first started university I was fearful of pagan philosophy. I was not sure if my faith would be able to hold out against all the pagan thinking. After completing two years of university I am beginning to see how irrational non-Christian systems of thought are. I would never have dreamed that I would be able to challenge my professors in front of an entire class and demonstrate that what they are saying is irrational. Rarely a class goes by where I am not taught something that makes no sense. It is becoming easier for me to see through non-Christian thought.

Once you understand the rational superiority and necessity of the biblical worldview, you have nothing to fear from non-Christians. No argument is good enough to touch you. Nevertheless, allow me to offer you some advice.

The biblical worldview, as the revealed portion of the mind of God, is rationally invincible, so that no matter how high of a view you have of it, you can never overestimate it. But we sometimes overestimate ourselves because we underestimate the noetic effects of sin. The disciples had a false confidence, and they abandoned Christ even though they claimed that they were willing to die with him.

You should guard and nurture your faith as God's precious gift to you. Even though it is secure in Christ, and even though you should boldly express and exercise it, you should not be careless with it or subject it to abuse. Therefore, although to major in philosophy at a secular university is one legitimate step in the process of building a life that glorifies God, I urge you to do adequate preparation.

You should look into the curriculum and course requirements for a philosophy major in your university, and obtain a list of the essential works that they will have you study and interact with. Then, over the summer, read some of these books to make sure that you can "handle" them.

This way, you will be reading the books, perhaps for the first time, at your own pace and in an environment of your choice. You will have the time to carefully construct refutations to all the non-Christian arguments in them, and to look up relevant Christian resources to help you with this, without the rush and the pressure that often accompany the pace of the regular school year. Moreover, this will also help you with your performance once school begins, especially if you take good notes while you read these books during the summer.

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<sup>36</sup> The following is an edited correspondence.

## 20. The Futility of Pragmatic Arguments<sup>37</sup>

Regarding your essay on the biblical perspective on drug use, I have not read it as carefully as I would like to, but I wish to reply with some initial comments. Your quote from John Frame is particularly interesting:

Legalizing drugs is, in my mind, a live option. The "war on drugs" doesn't seem to have been successful, and it is unlikely to succeed in the near future. Legalization would lower the cost of drugs and therefore the crime rate. I'm inclined toward a position that would legalize drugs for adults but provide harsh penalties for those who sell to children. This parallels the regulation of alcohol and tobacco. I'm inclined to think that adults should have to take responsibility for their own choices in this area.

I had not read this before and was surprised that he used such a poor pragmatic argument. By now I should not be surprised by bad arguments, but sometimes they are so obviously fallacious that I am still taken by surprise, especially when they are offered by people who should know better.

Even if we could agree that the "war on drugs" does not work, pragmatic arguments are weak because there are often ways to make something work that does not work – it is just that people refuse to make it work.

Consider the policy on punishment against illegal drug use. I suspect that if the government makes even minimum drug use a capital crime, punishable by immediate execution regardless of age, then the war on drugs would indeed "work" better. Or, if it is the government's policy to immediately kill the drug user, all his friends, and all his relatives, I am quite sure that there would be fewer drug users. Of course I am not suggesting that this should be the policy, but I am saying that when a person uses a pragmatic argument against something, I can often make a suggestion that turns the conclusion around.

The death penalty is another example. Those who oppose the death penalty often say that it is no good because it fails to deter crime. This assumes that punishment is only for the purpose of deterrence, but ignoring that for now, we must ask *why* capital punishment does not deter. Perhaps it is because after we catch and convict the criminals, we feed them, make them comfortable, let them repeatedly appeal for many years, give them all kinds of rights and privileges, and then after all that, we kill them with a painless injection.

I am quite sure that capital punishment would deter crime if the government would kill all convicted criminals within six months, and with the most painful, gruesome, and prolonged

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<sup>37</sup> The following is an edited correspondence with someone who sent me his essay on the biblical perspective on drug use.

punishment imaginable, and broadcast it on public television to show potential criminals how they would be treated.

Again, I am not suggesting that this ought to be the policy, but only that the pragmatic argument is no good, because if the argument is that it does not work, then all I have to do is to suggest something that would make it work. When you base an argument on whether something works, the opponent can often just give a counter-example.

There are many other problems with pragmatic arguments. For example, it identifies the good or the "ought" with the practical. Also, it assumes that the end by which the means are judged is indeed the end that ought to be desired.

## 21. Not Enough "Faith" to be an Atheist?

When defending the Christian faith, believers would at times say something like, "I do not have enough *faith* to be an atheist." This includes some proponents of presuppositional apologetics, who would abuse the word by saying that every worldview must begin by taking its first principles on "faith." However, this is both biblically false and strategically unwise.

When non-Christians make the accusation that we affirm Christianity only on "faith," they are not using the biblical definition of the word, but by it they mean something like, "belief by pure assumption without any rational justification." Some Christians then make a rational case for Christianity, and conclude, "It takes even more faith to be an atheist, and I do not have enough faith to be an atheist."

When used this way, faith means mere credulity, and this implies that Christianity is affirmed by credulity, only that it takes even more credulity to be an atheist. This unbiblical use of the word encourages the audience to have a little credulity, so that he will become a Christian, but not too much, lest he becomes an atheist. But if this is what "faith" means, then why not renounce all credulity and have no faith at all?

The problem is further aggravated when Christians assert *in the same context* that faith is not mere credulity, but that it is rational. But if we plug this back into the statement, "I do not have enough faith to be an atheist," then it becomes an admission that atheism is more rational, which is exactly what they denied when they first said, "I do not have enough faith to be an atheist."

In Scripture, faith is always a good thing, and it is always good to have more of it. But suddenly, in the very context of defending "faith," Christians assert that atheism must also begin with "faith," and that atheists in fact have more of it, since it takes even more "faith" to be an atheist. Then, in the same discussion, they also say that "faith" is rational, and that the atheists do not have it at all because it is a gift of God. Or are they saying that a little of this divine gift would make us Christians, but a lot of it would make us atheists?

If we are using the biblical definition – if we are talking about the kind of faith that we have and want our hearers to have – then, the truth is that if I have any faith at all, even as small as a mustard seed, I would not be an atheist. The atheist has no faith, not more faith. If we are using the biblical definition of the word, then if you have any faith at all, you are already a Christian.

So, this misuse of the word "faith" may seem clever to some, but it is in fact unbiblical, foolish, confusing, and self-defeating. We should never use the word to denote credulity. Rather than saying, "I do not have enough of a *good* thing to be an atheist," we should say, "I do not have enough of a *bad* thing to be an atheist." Thus it is much more appropriate to say, "I am not *stupid* enough to be an atheist."

It follows that we should never say, "We must all begin with faith." No, we do not. We all begin from some first principle as the logical starting point of our thinking. Christians affirm Scripture as their starting point by faith-reason (a divine gift of intelligent assent to truth), but non-Christians affirm their various false and irrational first principles by their credulity and wickedness.

## 22. When There are Multiple Perspectives

From the comments that I receive from people, it seems that they are quite resistant to certain teachings, although they do not always explain. Sometimes their objection is based on the fact that various preachers have different opinions, so that they are unsure what they should believe.

In the case of Calvinism vs. Arminianism, one lady who had attended a Pentecostal seminary said that she once read a book that contained fifty points supporting Calvinism and another fifty points supporting Arminianism. So which should she believe?

She just gave up and said, "I will just forget about the whole thing and still keep preaching the gospel" – perhaps implying that she would stick to Arminianism since, in her thinking, Calvinism somehow eradicates evangelism.

You correctly suggest that a person who claims to be unable to decide based on the fact that there are arguments on both sides nevertheless does not, and really cannot, remain neutral. In this case, this woman cannot say that she will give up investigating and "just keep preaching the gospel," since, especially in the case of Calvinism and Arminianism, the debate pertains to the very nature of the gospel.

It is foolish to refuse to decide because there are multiple perspectives. People offer arguments for and against every religion (but not every argument is good). If she cannot decide between Calvinism and Arminianism because there are arguments on both sides, then neither should she be able to decide for or against Christianity. So how did she decide for Christianity, and how does her decision stick?

She says there are arguments for both sides, but do both sides have good arguments? For example, Arminians often argue that Calvinism (especially regarding its doctrine of election) teaches something that is unfair, that it contradicts justice. This may sound convincing to irrational and careless people, but this does not mean that it is a good argument. There are simple and conclusive answers to this objection. Those people just do not know about them, or in some cases, refuse to submit to them because of their intellectual dishonesty.

I can make up ten arguments asserting that I am the US President, but they will not be good arguments. For example, I can say, "I want to be the US President, therefore I am the US President." This is a real argument, but not a good one. Another one: "My mom says that I am a good boy, therefore I am the US President." This is also a real argument, with one explicit and one assumed premise, leading to the conclusion. But this argument is also fallacious and easily destroyed. It is not much harder to destroy every argument for Arminianism. In any case, it would be supremely stupid for someone to say that now she is unsure whether I am really the US President, since there are arguments on both sides!



You could sit down with her and actually examine those arguments. Your task would then be to show that Arminianism does not really have even one good argument in its favor. The truth is specific and exclusive, and there are no good arguments for falsehood. So it is not good enough if Calvinism wins ten points and Arminianism wins two – if you handle things right, Calvinism should have all the points and Arminianism should have zero.

This also applies when it comes to arguments that are based on biblical passages. If Calvinism is true and Arminianism is false, there should not be even one verse of Scripture that supports Arminianism. We affirm Calvinism not because there are more biblical passages that support it, but because all relevant biblical passages either explicitly teach it, or are at least consistent with it, whereas there are no biblical passages that teach Arminianism.

In a book where there are fifty arguments supporting Calvinism and fifty supporting Arminianism, there are probably quite a few bad arguments for Calvinism among those fifty points, and some of those bad arguments will be based upon inconsistent Calvinism. All bad arguments for Calvinism should be discarded. But then, if you will examine the fifty arguments for Arminianism, you should be able to destroy all fifty of them.

It makes no sense that a person should be confused about an issue because there are multiple perspectives. For every truth, there is logically an infinite number of possible falsehoods related to it or deviations from it. For example, if the truth is  $1 + 1 = 2$ , then, we can deviate from this by saying  $1 + 1 = 3$ , or 4, or 5, or 6, and so on to infinity. This is the case regarding any truth. It is a sign of an irrational and unstable mind to be bothered just because people disagree and offer arguments for different views. On the other hand, even if everyone agrees on something, it does not mean that the position that they agree on is correct. Whether something is popular or controversial is logically irrelevant.

## 23. Apologetics for Christian Students<sup>38</sup>

I am a philosophy major at a university in Texas. The school is associated with an incredibly liberal church, and the philosophy department is made up of six atheist professors.

Last semester I took a class on modern epistemology and found myself somewhat disappointed by the lack of Reformed Christian materials in that area. It was a rough semester for me being constantly bombarded by my professors.

Your essays have given me hope and courage once again. They are straightforward, easy to read, and in no way sugarcoat or compromise the truth. My summer reading so far has been so exciting and full of joy.

I recommend that you master the approach, and the very way of thinking, that I outline in my books. By doing this, you will become forever invincible to any unbiblical professor or philosophy that you will encounter.

A complete and effective approach to biblical apologetics demands that you become increasingly knowledgeable about your own biblical worldview. So studying reliable systematic theologies and biblical commentaries is a big part to becoming a better apologist.

The Bible is the ultra-rational infallible Word of God, so anyone can more or less become a master apologist when he firmly stands on it and faithfully argues from it. As I wrote in *Presuppositional Confrontations*, "Christians today are too quickly embarrassed by the intellectual challenges thrown at them by the unbelievers. Although we are not divinely inspired like the prophets and the apostles, if we will wholly depend on the revelation of Scripture, we will indeed be the master philosophers of this world. Because we have revelation as the foundation of our philosophy, unbelievers are not in fact competing against our own wisdom, but the very wisdom of God. Thus if we will only learn to apply divine revelation with skill when answering their challenges, there can be no real contest, but we will be able to destroy every unbelieving argument, and embarrass the gainsayers."

The biblical system is inherently rational and invincible. Any believer can become invincible against unbelief because of the inherent superiority of the biblical worldview. It cannot be successfully attacked, but it contains all the needed ingredients to destroy all other worldviews. You just need to learn how to unleash the overwhelming rational power of divine revelation in writing and in conversation.

If a person understands the content and the structure (as in the relationships between its various parts) of the biblical system, and if he is able to grasp the content and the structure

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<sup>38</sup> The following is an edited correspondence.

of his opponent's worldview, then he will always be able to seize a decisive victory in debate.

There is no chance that this person will lose, or even fail to win decisively, against anyone in all of human history – or against all of them combined. He will be able to crush the devil himself in debate, for the devil is not greater than the mind of Christ. This is the person that you can become, and must strive to become, through diligent study and persistent prayer, and God's sovereign grace.

## 24. Half Empty, Half Full

I was dialoguing with someone and he stated that "truth is just a matter of one's own perception."

He explained with an illustration. Take a glass of water which is half full. One person looking at the glass may say it is half full, and another person looking at it may say it is half empty. Which person is right? That was his line of argument.

Please show me how to answer something like this.

I have addressed relativism (and subjectivism, etc.)<sup>39</sup> in several places in my books, so you should review what I have already written on the subject. You should also read my *Apologetics in Conversation* to learn how to deal with people in conversation.

A basic response to relativism is that it is self-refuting. If he says that "truth is a matter of perception," then even *this* statement is only a matter of perception, so that it cannot be universally true that truth is a matter of perception. In other words, that truth is a matter of perception is nothing more than the person's perception. It does not mean that it is necessarily the case, and it does not mean that you have to accept it.

Then, the illustration consists of statements that are too ambiguous to prove his point, since they leave out vital information such as the reference point and the objects being considered, but once you insert the missing information, the statements become clearly absolute. That is, considering the full capacity of the glass, half of it contains water, and half it contains non-water (let us just say air). I am referring to only the water when I say, "The glass is half full," and I am referring to only the air (non-water part) when I say, "The glass is half empty," but both are absolute statements.

The claim is also sophistical. You mean something definite and different by "truth" (X) and "perception" (Y), and all he does is to change the meaning of "truth" so that it attaches to Y rather than to X. In other words, he is saying, "The word that you use to designate X should be used to designate Y instead." But then, what about X? Is there such a thing as X or not? Is X coherent or not? He evades this matter of truth without refuting it. In effect, his illustration merely explains to you what he means by Y, rather than refuting your conception of X.

It is possible to change the word "car" so that it now refers to a bicycle by declaring, "a car is just a bicycle," and then you can describe a bicycle to illustrate your meaning, but this has nothing to do with whether or not there are four-wheeled motorized transportation devices. Taking away the word "car" from you does not actually take away the car.

Moreover, once he has affirmed his premise, that "truth is a matter of perception," from now on everything that he says should be taken as just "a matter of perception." This is the

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<sup>39</sup> For the sake of convenience, I will just say "relativism" for the rest of this article.

logical consequence of his philosophy. You should not only tell him this, but you should really act like it and treat him by this standard in all your conversations and interactions with him.

That is, argue with him according to the logical implications of his philosophy, and then treat him according to its practical implications. Insist on this even when there will be serious or even dangerous consequences for him, for example, in matters that have to do with money, legality, or safety, and each time, remind him that you are only following his standard. He must either surrender, or suffer the consequences of his own philosophy.

Although I will be the first to tell you that only logical consequences matter in intellectual debate, and that practical consequences never amount to a logical refutation, he should indeed endure these consequences if he stands by his philosophy of relativism. If he will not heed rational arguments, perhaps this non-rational (practical) means of persuasion will make him reconsider the rational merits of his position.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, since he has not proved his premise (and he cannot, because any proof would just be a matter of perception), and since you have not affirmed it, the things that you say do not need to be taken as just a matter of perception.

Depending on his attitude and response (he might not surrender so easily), you might need to shock and offend him. So, with tape recorder in hand, ask him to restate his premise, that "truth is only a matter of perception." Then, you can say, it follows that it is only a matter of perception that his mother is not a slut and a whore, and that from a certain perspective, it is indeed "true" that his mother is a slut and a whore. Force him to admit it without evasion and qualification. After that, call his parents and play the tape back to them.

Repeat the procedure for other situations and relationships in his life. Make him admit that it is only a matter of perception that he is not stealing company property at his place of employment, and that from a certain perspective, it is indeed "true" that he is stealing company property. Then, call his employer and play him the tape.

Then, make him admit that he is an adulterer and that his wife is an ugly pig (as a matter of perception, of course), and then play the tape back to his wife. Make him admit that he is a murderer and a rapist, and that he wants to murder and rape his own children (again, as a matter of perception), and then play the tape back to his children, or also to everyone who knows him.

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<sup>40</sup> To argue from the practical consequences of a position commits the fallacy of affirming the consequent. Even if a person suffers and dies because of his philosophy, this does nothing to *logically* refute it – all it might mean is that the *true* philosophy is unlivable. Many philosophy textbooks, including those by Christian philosophers, will tell you that one crucial test for a philosophy is its "livability," so that a true philosophy must be livable, that it must be possible to be practically implemented. However, there is no rational argument for this principle or assumption; it is an arbitrary test imposed by an irrationally pragmatic mindset. A practical test cannot indicate a true philosophy, and a true philosophy never needs a practical test. The biblical worldview is indeed practical, in the sense that it is livable and that by it one can faithfully follow God's wise precepts and commands; however, it is true not because it is practical, but because it is God's revelation of the truth.

Of course, you should tell him that you are recording him and what you are going to do with the tape, giving him a chance to recant his philosophy. You are not trying to trick him, or to make him admit anything that is contrary to his own explicit philosophy. You are not really the one saying these things (since you deny that truth is just a matter of perception), but you are asking him whether these are some of the things that he would say, as he should, given his philosophy. He ought to be fine with the consequences, brought upon him by his own philosophy. Perhaps he should defend himself to those he thus offends by teaching them relativism.

If anything bad happens to him, he has done it to himself by his philosophy. If trouble befalls him because of this, then it is still just "a matter of perception" that these consequences are undesirable. He does not have to be a relativist, and he can surrender at any time when you confront him as above. So it is his fault if he remains stubborn.

In any case, this procedure is a pragmatic method, making his life unlivable by his philosophy, and nothing in it amounts to a logical refutation of relativism.<sup>41</sup> Thus, even if he surrenders under these circumstances, it does not mean that you have logically refuted relativism by pragmatism, since pragmatism cannot refute anything. However, by employing this non-rational method, you might successfully force this irrational person to engage you again in debate, and to reconsider the rational merits of the biblical view.

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<sup>41</sup> The logical refutations were presented toward the beginning of this article. The procedure described here is only to shock him back into a rational discussion.

## 25. The Practical and Existential in Evangelism

Is it always preferable to do evangelism using the approach taught in your *Ultimate Questions*, rather than appealing to the existential values and the practical advantages of coming to Christ?

In *The Light of Our Minds*, I show that apologetics and evangelism can be distinguished from each other, but they have such an intimate relationship that there is often no need to speak of them as separate and different – that is, unless we are involved in a discussion that requires greater precision, and thus the distinction.

*Ultimate Questions* is more about apologetics and philosophy than evangelism.<sup>42</sup> The method espoused there is always the best way to do apologetics, since logically speaking, your opponent can evade anything other than valid deductive arguments, often just by saying, "I don't care," "That doesn't prove anything," or "So what?"

But since most people are irrational, they often respond better to non-rational or irrational methods. For example, a personal testimony is often effective (at least in producing superficial effects in the hearers, but not in producing faith), although it does not really prove anything. Then, although the apostles mainly emphasized God's grace and purpose, and man's need to repent and believe, they did mention some of the existential benefits of coming to Christ.

It depends on your audience as to the effects that you can expect from non-rational or irrational approaches. If you were to argue that Islam is a false religion because it instructs its adherents to murder those who oppose it, this might carry weight with some people, but I would reject the argument right away, since I would realize that it is fallacious. It is logically invalid to assert that Islam is wrong because violence is wrong; rather, it should be the other way around – if Islam is right, then violence is right. If Islam truly reveals the mind of God, then whatever Islam teaches is true, including violence; but if Islam is wrong, then the violence that it teaches is unjustified. We cannot begin from the violence that it teaches to determine whether or not Islam is wrong.

Yet we encounter similar irrational arguments all the time – the kind that puts things in the wrong order – and it is effective with many people. Sometimes this is because there is an innate knowledge of God and his moral laws in every person's mind. For example, there is an instinctive moral opposition to murder. Some cultures or people groups may have suppressed this more than others, but then other parts of their innate knowledge is more evident.

Due to this innate knowledge of God and his moral laws, even arguments that are not strictly valid are often effective, since they appeal to something that is innate in the hearers. These invalid arguments apply some premise that the hearers already know, even as they

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<sup>42</sup> See *Presuppositional Confrontations*, chapter 2, where I blend together apologetics and evangelism.

try to suppress it in their minds. Still, this does not mean that we should tolerate or encourage these invalid arguments.

Because people are irrational, they are often deceived by premises and inferences that are outright false, so that even arguments that are completely void of truth<sup>43</sup> are often effective, that is, if they appeal to some sinful preference in the hearers. One important effect of regeneration and sanctification is to rescue man from this stubborn and pervasive irrationality.

The deductive/presuppositional approach is always preferable in apologetics, because it is the only rational route. And opportunities for evangelism often arise out of apologetic encounters – that is, from discussions in which the differences of worldviews generate disagreements. Your Christian worldview will often generate disagreements with other people about politics, science, ethics (abortion, adultery, etc.), world religions, and just about everything. But if the deductive/presuppositional approach is always better in an apologetic encounter, and evangelistic opportunities often arise from the clash of worldviews, then the need for the deductive/presuppositional approach comes up just about every time you do evangelism. Even if the encounter begins from a non-argumentative presentation of the gospel, if someone has a question or objection (which is common), you are back to doing apologetics.

The deductive/presuppositional approach is a necessary part of preaching the gospel, since much of it involves presenting the teachings of the Bible, knowledge that is necessary for salvation. The apostles themselves employed deductive/presuppositional arguments in their preaching, to both believers and unbelievers. Reading the preaching of the apostles, some people can see only personal testimony, since they are predisposed to notice these things, but they perform poorly even when relating their personal experiences. And of course, their personal experiences are nothing like the apostles', who were with Jesus for several years, and who were witnesses to his death and resurrection.

Nowadays, when people talk about personal testimony, they often have in mind a feeling of ecstasy or exhilaration (which is not the same as conversion), a moral reformation (but they are still not very moral), even a vision or some other special experience (but the message they attach to this may not be the biblical gospel), or otherwise some silly story that does not really contribute to the case for the gospel. Do not assume that someone is doing what the apostles did when he gives his personal testimony – it is usually nothing like theirs.

If you present some sort of pragmatic argument, then so can the atheist, the Communist, the Mormon, and just about anybody from any belief system. Just about anybody from any belief system can tell you about what he considers to be a positive change in his life that resulted from that belief system.

Thus pragmatic arguments are logically worthless, although they are often psychologically compelling. How rational is your audience? The more rational your audience, the more you

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<sup>43</sup> These arguments are invalid and contradict both biblical revelation and man's innate knowledge



risk being laughed at by using a pragmatic argument. If a Buddhist says to me that Buddhism changed in his life, I need not challenge the claim – I can just laugh at him. It does not prove that Buddhism is true. Even a movie or a novel can change a person's life or inspire moral reform, but it says nothing about whether or not the philosophy behind the movie or the novel is true.

An argument based on effect or personal experience works like this:

1. If X, therefore Y
2. Y
3. Therefore, X

This type of reasoning is called "affirming the consequent," which is always fallacious. But it is the exact reasoning process employed by every argument that appeals to the empirical and the practical, and it is the very core of science.<sup>44</sup>

Jesus says, "You will know them by their fruit"; however, apart from biblical revelation, we cannot even specify what is good fruit and what is evil fruit. Of course Jesus knew this, and he was certainly not telling us to evaluate a person by our own non-biblical opinion or standard.

Similarly, when you give a personal testimony about your faith, or when you enumerate some of the existential benefits of coming to Christ, the testimony and those benefits could be considered positive only because they are specified as such from the biblical perspective. So, rationally speaking, if the pragmatic and existential were to worth anything, they must still be derived from a biblical/deductive/presuppositional foundation, for by themselves, they are irrational and irrelevant.

Thus, although it is often acceptable to present your personal testimony or to discuss the existential benefits of coming to Christ, you must not attribute to them a higher rational status than they deserve, and you must firmly base them on the foundation of biblical revelation, and discuss them only within such a context. You should give them a minor role in your overall presentation, since in themselves they do not even present the gospel. They do not communicate the word of life, or the power that saves.

In short, it is best to preach the gospel through biblical expositions, clash with your opponent using the deductive/presuppositional approach, and then as optional illustrations (not as rational arguments), perhaps relate your personal experience and some of the existential benefits of faith.

These are not necessarily done in the above order, but they can be flexibly blended together in the course of your conversation with the unbeliever. In addition, one aspect of your presentation must not contradict another. For example, after you have completely destroyed the rational standing of induction, sensation, intuition, and science as part of your

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<sup>44</sup> See Bertrand Russell, "Is Science Superstitious?"

apologetic, do not then elevate your personal experience or self-knowledge to the undeniable rational certainty that can be attributed only to Scripture.

Finally, although non-rational or irrational approaches sometimes appear more effective because most people are irrational, it does not follow that we should tolerate this. In fact, as long as one's faith is not mainly or only based on the biblical and the rational, but on the personal, practical, or existential, that faith might even be spurious, or at least forever feeble. Therefore, part of our presentation of the Christian faith should be to challenge the irrational standards of our hearers. Why should they respond better to personal testimonies, or to practical or existential arguments, than to biblical and rational arguments? They should not, and this is precisely one of the things that we should get across while preaching the gospel and defending the faith.

## 26. God and Language<sup>45</sup>

Language is always adequate to express anything. The real issue is whether the mind can conceive something. If you can think it, you can designate any sign to represent it. In principle, you can use "X" to represent the contents of an entire book. There is nothing inherently contradictory or impossible about this.

It follows that language itself is adequate to say anything about God – I am sure that God can verbalize anything about himself. Again, "X" is language, and it can represent any thought, so the limitation is in one's mind, not in language itself. I do not say that we can know or think everything about God. Since he is infinite, there is always more to know or to think about him that we do not already know or think about him. But whatever we can know or think about him, we can say about him.

As for positive and negative language about God, there are those who insist that at least some things about God can be expressed only in negative language. This is not true. I can easily turn into positive language anything that is said about God in negative language.

For example, R. C. Sproul once said that to say that God is "immutable" is negative language, that since we are human, we know only what "mutable" means, and that God is not "mutable," so that it is impossible to express this divine attribute in positive language. This was awfully careless of him – what about saying, "God always *stays the same*"? That is positive language, and we know what it means.

Some people think that it sounds more pious or reverent to say that we cannot talk about God in positive terms, but this is both biblically and philosophically false and unnecessary.

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<sup>45</sup> The following is an edited message sent in response to a question on the topic.

## 27. Professional Morons

### MORONS AND PROFESSIONAL MORONS

According to the Bible, all non-Christians are morons – they are extremely stupid people.<sup>46</sup> Even some of those who claim to be Christians resent such a blunt and negative characterization of God's enemies, and so they disown and criticize me for speaking this way. However, as hard as they portray this as something that I have taken upon myself to assert, I am merely repeating what the Bible teaches. If they have a problem with it, then instead of disowning or criticizing me, they should face reality and disown Christ and criticize the Bible.

Some Christian writers are very courteous. In fact, they are so courteous that they allow their critics to haunt them to their deaths while patiently explaining again and again their unpopular but biblical views. Of course I believe in cordial discourse, especially in contexts in which the Bible commands it. However, these critics are often not interested in hearing what the Bible really says, but they are interested in protecting their own unbiblical opinions and beliefs, all the while insisting that they are genuine believers.

While I respect and even prefer polite theological discussions, when my critics use me to attack Scripture by proxy, I will expose them as the hypocrites that they are, and slam them down by the power of Christ, that is, by the very Scripture and Reason that they undermine.

It is important to realize that non-Christians are morons and that I am right in stating this as an integral part of the biblical approach to apologetics. This is because if we are going to face our intellectual enemies with Scripture as our weapon, then we better first accept Scripture's own description of the non-Christians, that they are stupid and sinful. No wonder many Christians are such feeble apologists! They have rejected Scripture's own description about the situation from the start.

I have often said that the person who affirms the biblical worldview and who practices the biblical apologetic can easily and conclusively defeat any non-Christian. It does not matter whether the non-Christian is an atheist, a Muslim, a Buddhist, or a Catholic, and it does not matter if the non-Christian is highly educated. In fact, I have stated that even a toddler who has been trained in biblical apologetics can decisively crush any professor of science or philosophy. Here I will go further. I assert that even a person who is mentally damaged or retarded in some way, but who can nevertheless communicate in fragmented statements, can still defeat any non-Christian scientist or philosopher.

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<sup>46</sup> I have provided biblical justification for this statement in numerous places in my writings, so I will not repeat it here. See Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology, Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, Apologetics in Conversation, Commentary on Ephesians*, and "A Moron by Any Other Name"; Douglas Wilson, *The Serrated Edge: A Brief Defense of Biblical Satire and Trinitarian Skylarking* (Canon Press, 2003); Robert A. Morey, "And God Mocked Them" (audio); and James E. Adams, *War Psalms of the Prince of Peace: Lessons From the Imprecatory Psalms* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1991).

Of course, some of us are able to argue with more finesse than others. And if you are a child, or a person with severe mental disabilities, or just a person who is unfamiliar with technical expressions, you might have to ask your non-Christian opponent to express his ideas and arguments in simpler language. But when it comes to the substance of the debate, as long as you can grasp the fundamental principles of the biblical worldview and the biblical apologetic, you too can be an invincible apologist for the Christian faith against any non-Christian opponent.

I have also said that although a non-Christian scientist or philosopher might give a better presentation of his views, the substance of his arguments are never really better than any other non-Christian, including the retarded and the insane. That is, a non-Christian scholar might be able to argue his case with greater precision, coherence, and thoroughness, but when it comes to the rational merits of his arguments, his case is always just as foolish and fallacious as that of any uneducated and even mentally retarded non-Christian.

This is true not only when they are speaking about God or religion, but it is true about everything that they say. A person's view on the ultimate reality, being ultimate, necessarily affects every area of his worldview; therefore, because the non-Christian is wrong about the ultimate reality, he is wrong about everything.

I say all of this not only because I enjoy insulting and belittling non-Christians (and it is often proper to do this; 1 Kings 18:27); rather, this is a biblical teaching that very few Christians are faithful enough to emphasize, but many Christians are evil enough to oppose. Those who say anything about it at all usually obscure the teaching by their almost poetic language, making human depravity and wickedness, and the effects of sin on the mind, sound almost beautiful. But the Bible is blunt and unambiguous on this matter. It teaches that God has made "moronic" non-Christian philosophers and scholars, along with all their ideas (1 Corinthians 1:20). On this word, even the basic and popular *Strong's Concordance* yields the definition, "to make as a simpleton," so that there is no excuse in failing to understand the verse this way. Therefore, in the name of Jesus Christ and by the authority of Scripture, I charge every Christian with sin who distorts or hides this teaching, or who tries to undermine the efforts of others to proclaim it.

#### **TEACHING NONSENSE FOR A LIVING**

Since I interact almost exclusively with the works of professionals, in my writings I have already provided a number of examples on how even the most educated of non-Christians never rise above the stupidest of humanity in the substance of their arguments. Here I will offer yet another example from the debate between William Lane Craig and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong.

Sinnott-Armstrong is Professor of Philosophy and Professor of Legal Studies at Dartmouth College. Even if he is not among the very best of contemporary thinkers, his credentials and achievements are at least equal to many professional philosophers. In addition, one with the fame and stature of William Lane Craig thought it worthwhile to debate him. So let no one say that I have deliberately chosen an inferior specimen to criticize.

One atheist is just as easy for me to refute as another, so I do not have to use Sinnott-Armstrong as an example. But let me tell you why I have chosen him. I had obtained the book containing the debate some time ago, and among other things, took notice of the fallacious statements written by him that I will show you below. I thought that I could use them in some future writing project as illustrations.

Then, one day my wife came home and said that she heard William Lane Craig in an interview on a Christian radio program. The interview was mainly to promote this book, and the host asked Craig about several of the issues that were discussed in the debate. My wife thought that Craig's responses were too uncertain, too tentative, and she wondered whether such weak answers do more damage rather than good for the Christian cause.

I could understand her sentiment, because even when we overlook the fatal flaws of classical apologetics, I had always thought that Craig's arguments and conclusions are so "modest" that they are unbiblical. They fail to exude the confidence and certainty that a Christian leader should exhibit in both his attitude and presentation, and to instill this same confidence and certainty in other Christians. In any case, I will not turn this into a critique of Craig's presentation – I am only explaining why my wife and I were dissatisfied with it.

As I flipped through the debate again, I realized that it would be too inefficient to write a complete alternate response to Sinnott-Armstrong's arguments. This is because many of his challenges are directed toward classical or evidential apologetics, and they do not even touch the biblical arguments, so that even if his arguments are successful, it would not affect the biblical approach that I teach and practice. Moreover, his essays are presented in the context of his debate against Craig, so that unless my readers have read the debate, I would have to explain the context from scratch when presenting my own response.

Therefore, as much as I would like to do it, I will not present a thorough critique of Sinnott-Armstrong's arguments. Instead, I will criticize one aspect of his thinking and presentation, mainly his arguments on the problem of evil. Although the result does not amount to a refutation of all his individual arguments, it is sufficient to show that, although he is a professor in philosophy, his reasoning ability does not rise above that of the average atheist, and so a professional moron is a moron still. With all this in mind, let us now consider the case of Walter Sinnott-Armstrong.

In one place, he explains why he cares enough about the topic to participate in a public debate. He writes:

My answer is that I am a teacher, so my job is to educate. I am also a philosopher. Philosophers question common assumptions and inspect the reasons for and against those assumptions. That is why I want to help readers get clear about the evidence for and against the existence of God, so that they can decide for themselves.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> William Lane Craig and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *God? A Debate Between a Christian and an Atheist* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 81.

This assertion about his motive is helpful to our analysis, because it commits him to an intellectual policy against which we can compare his actual arguments. And when he fails to live up to his own policy, it makes his hypocrisy and incompetence all the more obvious.

Although his stated policy is to "question common assumptions," he nevertheless depends on numerous subjective or intuitive premises and common assumptions throughout his presentation.

On page 34, he writes, "Craig still might ask, 'What's immoral about causing serious harms to other people without justification?' But now it *seems natural* to answer, 'It simply is. Objectively. Don't you agree?'" No, I do not agree. His response amounts to saying, "It *seems* objective," but if a belief is based on "it seems," then it is by definition subjective, not objective. When you say "it seems" in a context like this, you are telling us something about yourself, and not about something that is outside of your own mind.

I demand more than "it seems natural." I demand a rational justification. What if what "seems natural" to you seems *unnatural* to me? What if what seems natural to a normal person seems unnatural to an insane person? Now what is normal and what is insane? And who is normal and who is insane? How do we know? Is "it seems natural" an adequate justification in any argument? If not, when is it adequate and when is it inadequate? How do we know? This "it seems natural" *seems* irrational, and outright lazy.

Then, he writes, "Similarly, if *we look* long and hard at a natural evil, such as an intestinal blockage, and *we find* nothing to suggest any adequate compensation, then *we are justified* in believing that there is no adequate compensation for that evil."<sup>48</sup> This pattern of argument occurs throughout his presentation; that is, our subjective intellectual investments into the situation are supposed to suffice in producing a rational justification for making an inference about objective reality. Sinnott-Armstrong appears to think that rational justification consists of our subjective satisfaction, and not necessary inferences.

In another place, he writes, "I am trying to show that *common sense* commits you to the premises of my argument."<sup>49</sup> Whether or not it is true that "common sense" commits us to his premises, how does he know that what we believe according to our "common sense" is true? He neither challenges nor establishes our "common sense" as a reliable way to truth, but simply assumes it in his arguments.

On page 145, he says, "It might sound neat to say that God is not subject to our standards, but this ploy leaves it unclear what it is that makes God good. In the end, we need to use our own standards, because we cannot understand any others." But it is not automatically true that if God is not subject to our standards, then this leaves it unclear what it is that makes God good. The biblical doctrine of God's goodness answers the question, and Sinnott-Armstrong must confront the doctrine before making such a statement; that is, he must establish that the Bible is not God's written revelation.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

Then, notice he says that "we need to use our own standards, *because* we cannot understand any others." But this is a purely pragmatic reason, and not a logical one. It amounts to saying, "We need to pretend that this is true because we have nothing else." And who is he to speak for all of us? Just because he cannot "understand any others" does not mean that the rest of us cannot. Just because he is stupid and ignorant does not mean that he can drag the rest of us down with him. But even if we really cannot "understand any others," it does not mean that we must pretend that what we have is true. Why not resign ourselves to skepticism and ignorance? Moreover, philosophers constantly argue about what "our standards" should be in the first place. I contend that biblical standards should be "our standards."

Sinnott-Armstrong concludes the debate by saying, "In contrast, I tried to base my arguments on commonsense standards of reasonable belief and adequate compensation."<sup>50</sup> Thus throughout the debate he appears completely oblivious to the fact that he has said, "I am also a philosopher. Philosophers question *common assumptions* and inspect the reasons for and against those assumptions."

The only way to reconcile his stated policy (to question common assumptions) with his actual strategy (to appeal to common sense) is if he makes a sharp distinction between common assumptions and common sense. That is, common *assumptions* refer to certain shared beliefs, while common *sense* refers to a shared intellectual ability or intuition that is in itself without content. But if this is what he does, then for a professional philosopher to leave this point unstated when the two are so easily confused or identified is still inexcusable.

In any case, numerous problems would remain even if he makes a sharp distinction between common assumptions and common sense. For example, if common sense refers to only a shared intellectual ability or intuition without content, then how could this "sense" that is so common produce these common "assumptions" that he now challenges using common "sense"? That is, if the "sense" and the "assumptions" contradict each other, then how can both be "common"?

Perhaps the common assumptions (that Sinnott-Armstrong challenges) were adopted because people failed to use common sense, in which case, common sense refers to a common ability or intuition that is not commonly used. Or, the common assumptions were produced by a common flaw in thinking that caused people to deviate from their common sense. But then what is this "flaw"? Is the "flaw" not part of the "sense"? Why or why not? And how does he know? Both of these views have problems, but we are already complicating the matter too much.

The truth is that Sinnott-Armstrong *does not* make a sharp distinction between common assumptions and common sense. He writes:

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 149.



In contrast, I tried to base my arguments on *commonsense standards* of reasonable belief and adequate compensation. *These principles* are not peculiar to atheists. Most Christians also use the same standards in their everyday lives. More importantly, these principles are accepted by almost everyone who is not committed in advance either for or against the existence of God. That makes them neutral starting points.<sup>51</sup>

He identifies the "commonsense standards" with "these principles." In other words, by common sense, he is not referring to a shared intellectual potential or ability apart from any content, but he is referring to actual common *beliefs*. In other words, in his mind, the commonsense standards *are* common assumptions. But if the task of the philosopher is to "question common assumptions," then why in the world does he not question those common assumptions ("principles," "standards," etc.) that he is using, and on which his arguments depend?

He has stated that he is arguing against the existence of God because it is his job as a philosopher to question common assumptions, but then he turns around and argues as if truth is a matter of agreement and popular opinion. In another context, he might challenge the same fallacy in his opponent, but when he has no case, he employs the "everybody knows" strategy. His error is not hidden, but both sides of his self-contradiction are explicitly asserted. On the one hand, for him the very purpose of the debate is to challenge common assumptions, but on the other hand, he bases essential aspects of his arguments on common assumptions ("principles," "standards," etc.) without first questioning or justifying them.

Although glaring errors pervade his entire presentation, this illegitimate appeal to popular opinion is the only philosophical blunder that I intend to document. However, since the above quoted paragraph contains additional claims by him, I will address them before moving on.

He says that the common principles on which he bases his arguments are affirmed not only by atheists, but also by Christians. Even if this is true, it does not show that his arguments are true, since he has yet to establish these principles, so that they can at best serve as the basis for an ad hominem argument. That is, perhaps these common principles are false, so that both atheists and Christians are wrong in believing them. But I say that they can "at best" support an ad hominem argument because they cannot even do that, since these are only principles that we supposedly agree on in our "everyday lives." He has yet to establish that those principles that apply in our "everyday lives" necessarily apply to the current debate.

But his case is even weaker than this. Since he appeals to these supposedly common principles as essential premises of his arguments (and not as mere personal opinion that does not affect the soundness of his arguments), this means that it is also essential to his arguments that these principles indeed be common. This he fails to show or even attempt to establish; rather, he just asserts again and again the commonality of his premises. In

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

other words, he says "everybody knows" when in fact nobody knows if everybody knows. How does he know what "most Christians" believe? Does he even know what most atheists believe?

At least equally problematic is the next statement, "More importantly, these principles are accepted by almost everyone who is not committed in advance either for or against the existence of God. That makes them neutral starting points."

He says that his premises are accepted by almost every neutral person. How does he know this? And who are these neutral people? Where are they? How does he know that it is possible to be neutral about God's existence? And how does he know that these people are neutral? Also, if there are so many atheists and neutral people out there, then why are the beliefs of Christians considered "common assumptions" that he claims to be his task to challenge as a philosopher?

He speaks as if almost one hundred percent of the human population already affirms his essential premises, and if so, this makes his premises much more common. But then, should he not start by challenging *those* common assumptions, instead of the Christians' assumptions, which now do not seem so common after all? And even if there are such things as "neutral starting points," why are they exempt from critical examination? Are they not much more dangerous, since they are so common and seemingly neutral, and so easily overlooked?

To assert that one should argue from neutral starting points entails another problem, namely, we can ask whether one's view toward neutrality is itself neutral. For Sinnott-Armstrong, to be "neutral" is to be not "committed in advance," but is he neutral about neutrality, or is he "committed in advance" to neutrality? If he is "committed in advance" to neutrality, then why should we trust him when he talks about neutrality? But if he is not "committed in advance" to neutrality, then he is neutral about neutrality. And if he is neutral about neutrality, then what compels him to become committed to neutrality? If he is neutral about neutrality, then why is he suddenly so concerned about being neutral?

If I make this the very point of debate – that is, if I propose to argue about whether we should be neutral about neutrality, and if I propose to first settle this issue as a logical and necessary precondition to the debate about the existence of God – then will Sinnott-Armstrong appeal to neutral starting points to establish his preference for neutral starting points? That is, will he appeal to the common assumptions of people who are neutral about neutrality in order to argue for his preference for neutrality?

According to his own standard and procedure, he must find people who are neutral about neutrality, then discover what these people believe about things that are relevant to neutrality, and then use *these* beliefs as so-called neutral starting points to argue for his preference for neutral starting points. But what happens after that? I will propose that as a logical and necessary precondition to the debate about being neutral about neutrality, we must first argue about whether those who are neutral about neutrality were neutral about being neutral about neutrality, and so on. This makes an infinite regress, and it also means

that Sinnott-Armstrong has no rational right to his so-called neutral starting points when debating the existence of God in the first place.

Look how far the human race has fallen, that someone can be so stupid! Like all other non-Christian scholars, Sinnott-Armstrong is an intellectual fraud. He passes himself off as a professional philosopher, and claims to be a man who examines the assumptions behind people's beliefs. Yet, at essential points in his arguments, he resorts to subjective intuition, common sense, and popular opinion. Professor of philosophy? I would not trust him to teach elementary school. He is better off roaming the streets and picking up soda cans – at least then he would be making an honest living. Where are the scholars? Where are the philosophers? Where are the professors of this world? Has not God made intellectual mincemeat out of them?

You exclaim, "What?! He calls himself a philosopher, and this is how he argues? What is wrong with him?!" I told you – he is a moron. He is a trained and experienced professional philosopher, not just some drunken bum. But is there a difference? As long as he remains a non-Christian and rejects divine wisdom, all he can do is to dress up his stupidity a little. Although some philosophers might manage a more careful presentation, none of them are rationally superior in the substance of their arguments. If I can demolish them, so can you. You only need to learn a biblical and logical way of thinking, and to gain confidence in the superiority of divine wisdom.

### **YOU CANNOT GET THERE FROM HERE**

Why do non-Christians reason like Sinnott-Armstrong and think that they are still practicing valid reasoning? It is because they cannot reach their desired conclusions by necessary inferences, and so they agree among themselves to redefine the standard of rational argumentation to something much lower, that is, something that is outright *invalid*. "Valid" reasoning becomes a matter of agreement and popularity, and not logical necessity.

Early on in his debate with Craig, Sinnott-Armstrong writes:

If we were not allowed to reach any conclusion without being completely sure, then we would never be allowed to reach any conclusion on any important matter, since we can never be completely sure about anything important (at least if it is controversial). The demand for certainty leads to ignorance and inaction.<sup>52</sup>

This is a significant admission. He concedes that *he* "can never be completely sure about anything important."<sup>53</sup> The conclusions of his arguments are never reached by necessary inferences from the premises, but by logical leaps, and this is what makes his conclusions "uncertain," or as I would say, invalid and irrational, to be dismissed in debate.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>53</sup> He applies the "we" to all of us, but I would reply, "Speak for yourself!" He does not represent us when our worldview and arguments are different from his and immune to the problem.

Although he adds, "at least if it is controversial," this does not help him at all; rather, it confirms that he regards validity and certainty as directly related to agreement and popularity, and not logical necessity. The implication is that a conclusion is more "certain" if more people agree with it. Its certainty is not measured by the logical rigor by which it is reached. But he later says that a philosopher is supposed to "question *common* assumptions"!

Of course, some non-Christians still define valid reasoning as a matter of logical necessity, but then they face the problem of not being able to formulate valid arguments. Some of those who are aware of this dilemma abandon the possibility of attaining knowledge of anything, and they become skeptics and agnostics. However, they cannot remain in these positions because skepticism and agnosticism are self-refuting. Rather, they must either embrace the biblical worldview or become insane. Most choose the latter.

Sinnott-Armstrong realizes that he cannot logically establish "anything important,"<sup>54</sup> and so he makes logic and certainty a pragmatic matter. He says that if we must be sure, then we would never reach any conclusion on any important matter. Then, instead of saying, "Therefore, we can never reach any conclusion on any important matter," he in effect says, "But we want to reach some conclusions no matter what, so we will change the rules." That is, "If we follow the rules, then we will never get there, but we want to get there, so we will change the rules." Although he cannot logically escape skepticism, he stays away from skepticism just because he dislikes skepticism, and because he wants to retain the right to make assertions about things, even when he has no such right. He is an intellectual fraud, and he wants to cheat.

Non-Christians are not only practicing this pragmatic redefinition of rationality, but they are teaching it. Again, we are aware that some non-Christians still think that they can establish their conclusions by logical necessity, but in reality they cannot. In fact, none of their arguments are rationally superior to Sinnott-Armstrong's arguments in substance. The difference is that they refuse to admit it, so that there is a different kind of self-deception than what we find in someone like Sinnott-Armstrong. When engaging them in debate, we would show that their arguments are just as fallacious. Right now we are focusing on those non-Christians who admit that they cannot establish "anything important" by logical necessity – I would say they cannot establish anything at all – but who still wish to consider themselves rational, so that they simply redefine rationality and valid reasoning.

We will use David Zarefsky as an example. Among his numerous credentials and achievements, Zarefsky is Professor of Argumentation and Debate and Professor of Communication Studies at Northwestern University. Therefore, as with Sinnott-Armstrong, let no one say that I have deliberately chosen an inferior specimen as an example of non-Christian foolishness.

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<sup>54</sup> I would remind the reader that he can speak only for himself.

In his syllabus for a course on argumentation,<sup>55</sup> he refers to deduction and induction, and he expresses his view on logical validity in these terms, so it would be helpful to define them and review their differences.

Deduction is the process of reasoning by which the conclusion is inferred from the premises by logical necessity. On the other hand, induction is the process of reasoning by which the conclusion is *not* inferred from the premises by logical necessity. In deduction, the conclusion includes only information that is already contained in and necessarily implied by the premises. But in induction, the conclusion includes new information that is *not* already contained in and necessarily implied by the premises.<sup>56</sup>

An inductive argument yields a conclusion that is *supposedly* but *not necessarily* implied by the premises. For this reason, induction is always a formal fallacy; that is, the conclusion is never certain, and never rationally established. In fact, since the conclusion is not necessarily implied by the premises, there is no way to logically show that there is any necessary relationship between the conclusion and the premises.

With the above in mind, Zarefsky writes, "Formal reasoning is not seen as the prototype of argumentation in recent scholarship."<sup>57</sup> By "formal reasoning," he is referring to deduction, when "one actually reason[s] in syllogistic form."<sup>58</sup> In his view, "Most argumentation is not represented by a form in which the conclusion contains no new information."<sup>59</sup> But he does not conclude, as I would, "Therefore, most argumentation is fallacious." Instead, he says that argumentation "involves enabling an audience to move from what is already known and believed to some new position," and "This movement involves *a leap of faith* that the arguer seeks to justify."<sup>60</sup>

He goes on to say, "*Judgment* is needed because absolute proof is not possible, *yet decisions must be made*."<sup>61</sup> Subjectivity is introduced into the process because of pragmatic concerns, that is, because "decisions must be made." He continues, "Judgment is sought by giving sufficient reason that a critical *listener* would *feel* justified in *accepting* the claim."<sup>62</sup> Instead of objectively and logically demonstrated, the claim is "accepted" if the listener "feel" that it is justified. Thus for Zarefsky, "Adherence of the critical listener becomes the *substitute* for absolute proof."

In other words, non-Christian philosophers realize that deduction is unrealistic and impossible for them, and so they have chosen to abandon deduction or deductive arguments, and instead they have decided to depend on subjective judgments based on induction or inductive arguments.

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<sup>55</sup> David Zarefsky, *Argumentation: The Study of Effective Reasoning, Part 1 and Part 2* (The Teaching Company, 2001).

<sup>56</sup> Zarefsky agrees with these definitions (*Argumentation, Part 1*, p. 13-15).

<sup>57</sup> *Part 1*, p. 15.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

And this means that their arguments are logically invalid. Zarefsky admits, "Applying the concept of validity beyond formal logic is tricky."<sup>63</sup> Why? "Because the claim does not follow from the evidence with certainty, we cannot say that if the evidence is true, the claim *must* be true."<sup>64</sup> We may ask, "If it does not follow *with certainty*, then does it follow *at all*?" In any case, what does he do? Does he write, "Therefore, we must concede that our arguments are invalid, and we must be honest and admit that our conclusions are mere subjective, non-rational, or even irrational opinions and speculations"?

No way! Instead of admitting that all their everyday arguments are invalid he says, in effect, "Let us *redefine* validity! Let us *agree* that even our leaps of faith are logically valid!"<sup>65</sup> You might say, "But we still must have a 'check on the process of reasoning,'<sup>66</sup> don't we?" "Of course," Zarefsky replies, "This function is achieved by focusing on *experience* rather than form."<sup>67</sup> That is, rather than thinking of validity as a matter of necessary inference, he proposes that "A general tendency develops over time for certain reasoning patterns to produce good or bad *results*."<sup>68</sup> Like Sinnott-Armstrong, he makes reasoning a pragmatic endeavor instead of a logical or rational one. It is also suggestive that his course is entitled, "Argumentation: The Study of *Effective* Reasoning," whereas if I were to teach a course on argumentation, I would instead entitle it, "Argumentation: The Study of *Necessary Inference*."

Non-Christians have abandoned rationality, because they cannot live up to the demands of logic or reason. Still, they want to go through the motions of reasoning, and they want to consider themselves rational. So they have redefined rationality as a matter of agreement rather than logical necessity. They cannot get from "here" to "there," but they still want to get "there," so they decide to take a leap of faith. If this sounds irrational and invalid, then they will just agree to define it as rational and valid.

Their strategy is that, "If you cannot get from here to there, then cheat. And if everybody cheats, then we will all look fine to one another. Although our conclusions are reached by leaps of faith, we would still like to think of ourselves as rational, so let us just agree that we are rational no matter what." It is "rationality" by agreement and by pure fantasy, and not by logical necessity or necessary inference.

You exclaim, "What?! Are they stupid?" Yes, they are stupid, and these are the same morons who attack your faith and call you irrational. They are desperate and dishonest. They find it impossible to remain rational apart from reliance on God's revelation, but they refuse to admit it. The pragmatic approach stems from the realization that they cannot arrive at the conclusions that they wish to prove by deduction, because given their non-Christian epistemologies, it is impossible for them to begin with self-authenticating

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<sup>63</sup> *Part 2*, p. 8.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8-10.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

premises from which they can deduce true conclusions by logical necessity. And even though there are still some non-Christians who try to live up to the standard of deduction, they cannot do it on the basis of their non-Christian epistemologies and first principles. Therefore, whether they try or not, we win.

### **CHRIST OUR REASON, REASON OUR WEAPON**

The Bible tells us that Christ is the Logos of God – he is the Word, the Wisdom, the Logic, or the Reason of God (John 1:1). Whoever rejects Christ rejects Reason itself. Those who attack Christianity make war against Reason, and so let it never be said again that unbelievers employ reason or logic to challenge Christianity – that never happens. Rather, non-Christians attack our faith with irrational and unwarranted assertions and speculations. But Christ is our champion, and Scripture-Reason is our weapon.

The non-Christians claim that Reason belongs to them, and this confuses uninformed Christians. As I have illustrated, although they place the Rock of Reason on their own shoulders, and proclaim it as their God and them its servants, they cannot bear its demands, and Reason immediately suffocates and crushes them. They slither from under it and try to excuse themselves from it. Then, they hit upon the idea that they could redefine Reason by patching together a huge ball of dung and call *that* Reason – it is much lighter, and surely no one would notice the stench! But the Christian who is skillful with the word of God will crush them and their dung ball with Jesus Christ, the Reason and Wisdom of God.

I have used Sinnott-Armstrong and Zarefsky as examples, but all other non-Christian thinkers are just as mentally feeble. It is as if they suffer from mental illness and retardation, because the truth is that this is indeed the case. Whether it is Michael Martin, Kai Nielsen, or some other non-Christian in the past or present, it makes no difference. Their irrationalism is necessarily connected with their unbiblical worldview, and anyone who eats and plays with feces would stink. And since their way of arguing is not unknowingly practiced, but deliberately and systematically taught to their students, future generations of non-Christians can only become worse and worse.

This brings us to an important point mentioned earlier. Can even children defeat these non-Christian professors in debate? They certainly can, if they are trained by their parents and their pastors. God has made the non-Christians foolish (1 Corinthians 1:20), and he delights in using the lowly things to humiliate them (v. 28). We should all participate, but who better to embarrass non-Christian scholars than the children, the mentally disabled, and the uneducated? But to succeed, they must embrace Christ as their Reason and they must affirm the whole Scripture as God's revelation. They must be properly taught.

Parents, teach your children systematic theology and biblical apologetics. You should start as soon as they begin to understand language. Train them to think biblically and logically. From the beginning of their lives, teach them to esteem that which God esteems, and to despise that which God despises.

Pastors, preach about the foolishness of non-Christians – expose them! Use them as public examples and show your people how to rationally demolish them and reduce them to

nothing. You will find the worst arguments even in their best works. Impart to your people the skill, the knowledge, and the confidence that they need to engage the unbelievers and win. Our goal is the total humiliation and annihilation of non-Christian scholarship. Our purpose is to beat its back and crush its head with Reason until it bows before the throne of Christ. To do that we must raise up an army of biblical thinkers, capable of demolishing any non-Christian in debate at the drop of a hat.

Some of you are still hesitant. You are still shackled by the standard of social discourse and propriety that non-Christians have imposed upon you.<sup>69</sup> This is a defense mechanism that they have installed in your mind to protect themselves against Reason. Stop being stupid! Stop being weak! Stop flattering and romancing that which God has condemned. Get in line with the biblical method and tone of gospel proclamation and defense. Rise up! Take your place in the army of God, and fight for his cause.

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<sup>69</sup> See Vincent Cheung, "A Moron by Any Other Name."



## 28. A Moron by Any Other Name

### INTRODUCTION

Someone recently wrote me and asked about the harsh language that I sometimes use when referring to non-Christians. Specifically, he questions the propriety of addressing the unbeliever with biblical invectives. Although I have already addressed this topic in several places in my writings, I thought that it would be helpful to share my answer to this inquirer with my readers.

Since my purpose is to aid understanding and not to preserve the question and answer in their original form, I have edited the question and expanded the answer.<sup>70</sup> The question serves to provide a context with which the answer can interact. And since the question and answer are no longer in their original form, note that the "you" in the answer portion no longer addresses the original inquirer.

### QUESTION

*I have read a few of your works and I have to say, I had never really considered apologetics and the mind of Christ in that manner – that the "wisdom" of unbelievers is utterly moronic and foolish, and completely irrational. I totally agree with all your conclusions.*

*However, is it the best thing to tell them this, with words like "moron," "intellectual feces," and so forth? I want to understand how you interpret 1 Peter 3:15 and Colossians 4:5-6 in light of the way you debate non-believers.*

### ANSWER

First, we should consider whether the descriptions are biblical. You say that you already agree with me on this, so I do not need to spend time establishing it here, although I will still give some attention to several specific words below.

Then, your question becomes whether we should *tell* the unbelievers what the Bible says about them. But the more appropriate question is whether we have any biblical justification to say that we must *hide* certain truths from the unbelievers. My position is that rather than hiding any biblical truth from the unbelievers, we should thoroughly disclose, expound, and *apply* to them all that the Scripture teaches.

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<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, the answer does not represent a complete biblical exposition on the topic. For more information, see Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology, Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, Apologetics in Conversation, Commentary on Ephesians*, and "Professional Morons"; Douglas Wilson, *The Serrated Edge: A Brief Defense of Biblical Satire and Trinitarian Skylarking* (Canon Press, 2003); Robert A. Morey, "And God Mocked Them" (audio); and James E. Adams, *War Psalms of the Prince of Peace: Lessons From the Imprecatory Psalms* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1991).

Consider the prophets, the apostles, and Christ himself. They all used very strong and even scathing words to criticize hardened sinners. Probably the only counter-argument that I have heard on this point is that they were the infallible *exceptions*. Well! This is certainly convenient. But why were they the exceptions in *this* area? Why does it require infallibility to use harsh words? And why were they the exceptions only when it comes to using harsh words and not when it comes to using kind words? No, I refuse to accept mere opinion or speculation on this, but I demand a biblical, exegetical response.

Their principle seems to be that whenever you find certain things in the Bible that you do not approve, or that you do not want to practice, just call them "exceptions." The blatantly anti-Christian element in their use of Scripture is that, not only do they say that the prophets, the apostles, and Christ were the exceptions in the sense that I have no right to *originate* these invectives, but that I do not even have the right to *apply* or *repeat* the same invectives that they used to the same type of people to whom they used them.

### 1 Peter 3:15

Of course, 1 Peter 3:15 is frequently used to assert that we must be "nice" when doing apologetics. The verse says, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this *with gentleness and respect*...." But what does it mean to do apologetics with "gentleness and respect"? Does it mean what the *unbelievers* tell us it means? Does it mean to be non-offensive, non-confrontational, non-threatening, and to be soft-spoken and sheepish? Or is it *infallibly* explained and demonstrated by the words and examples of the prophets, the apostles, and Christ himself? We should not assume that the apostle is referring to what the *unbelievers* consider to be gentleness and respect; rather, we must pay close attention to the context of the verse.

The context of this verse is mainly about Christians who are facing persecution and interrogation *from the authorities* (government officials, masters, etc.); it does *not* directly address public preaching or ordinary discourse among peers. Matthew Henry writes that the verse is referring to "the fear of God" and "reverence to our superiors."<sup>71</sup>

Indeed, when we read the Acts of the Apostles, we see that the disciples were *usually* more polite when defending themselves before government officials. Even then, Jesus called Herod "that fox" (Luke 13:32). There is a more detailed example from Paul in Acts 23:

(3) Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!"

(4) Those who were standing near Paul said, "You dare to insult God's high priest?"

(5) Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'"

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<sup>71</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1991).

Note that Paul said, "God will strike you" and "you whitewashed wall." He essentially cursed the person in the name of God and called him a hypocrite and law-breaker to his face. But then, in relation to what I said about the context of 1 Peter 3:15, when Paul discovered that he was speaking to the high priest, he implied that he would not have said what he said if he had known (v. 5).

Thus, verse 3 illustrates that my approach to the unbelievers is similar to Paul's, and verses 4-5 illustrate that my understanding of 1 Peter 3:15 makes Peter and Paul consistent. The way my critics and many other believers distort 1 Peter 3:15 would make Peter condemn Paul on verse 3, unless Paul is somehow an "exception," and thus excused from obeying 1 Peter 3:15. On the other hand, my understanding of 1 Peter 3:15 means that Paul did not necessarily contradict 1 Peter 3:15 in verse 3 (since he did not know that he was speaking to the high priest), and he even indicated his agreement with 1 Peter 3:15 in verses 4 and 5.

Now, I am guessing that my critics would disapprove if I am the one saying something like what Paul said in verse 3. Yet, here it is – Paul did it himself. But of course, Paul was the exception, right? But the exception to what? The exception to "gentleness and respect"? If my critics were to use 1 Peter 3:15 against me, and then call the prophets, the apostles, and Christ the exceptions, then they must also affirm that the prophets, the apostles, and Christ himself were exceptions *to gentleness and respect* in numerous instances, and that in those cases, they showed *no gentleness* and *no respect*.

#### **Colossians 4:5-6**

As for Colossians 4:5-6, there is nothing about these verses that contradicts my approach. The verses read as follows: "*Be wise* in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always *full of grace, seasoned with salt*, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

My critics falsely apply these verses against my approach. They assume that to use invectives against unbelievers is to not act wisely toward outsiders, and to speak without grace and without salt. But what is the "wisdom" referred to here? What is "grace" and what is "salt"? Why do these things mean what my critics say they mean – that is, to be "nice," soft-spoken, polite, non-insulting, non-offensive, non-critical, and so forth? What does the Bible mean by these words, and in this context?

Matthew Henry writes, "Grace is the salt which seasons our discourse, makes it savoury, and *keeps it from corrupting*."<sup>72</sup> He seems to think that the passage is emphasizing the moral quality or the purity of our conversation, even if other things are implied. So rather than just assuming that Paul is here saying what they want him to say, my critics should offer at least a basic exegetical argument before making accusations.

In any case, if the instruction to "be wise" and to speak with "grace" and "salt" contradicts my approach, then it also contradicts the prophets, the apostles, and Christ himself. Of

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

course, my critics will say that they were the exceptions. But the exceptions to what? The exceptions to "grace" and "salt"? The exceptions to "be wise"? So are they saying that Christ at times spoke with *no grace* and *no salt*? And are they calling Christ *stupid*, that at times he behaved foolishly toward outsiders? I demand that they look up to heaven and repeat this blasphemy to God's face before applying these verses against me.

In contrast, I dare not and wish not blaspheme. I affirm that Christ was consistently wise in his conduct and conversation, and that he always spoke with grace and salt, and that he always maintained an attitude that was pleasing to God. And I submit that my critics have imposed upon Scripture their own anti-biblical definitions of these words and concepts, and thus at least indirectly blasphemed Christ and directly slandered me.<sup>73</sup> For this, I charge them with sin and urge their repentance. I plead with them to stop defying the Word of God, and condemning those who follow it, but instead to adopt the biblical method and tone in proclaiming and defending the gospel against unbelievers.

### **Morons and Feces**

As for "moron" and "feces," even these are biblical words. The word "moron" is derived from the Greek *moros*. Paul uses it in Romans 1:22. There it is translated "fools," but of course that means the same thing as "morons," and indeed could have been just as easily and correctly translated as such. As for "feces," Paul uses a word that is translated "dung" or "refuse" to refer to his former life as an unbeliever in Philippians 3:8. Thayer's Lexicon explains that the word can refer to "any refuse, as the excrement of animals." Both the meanings of these words and the contexts in which they appear agree with the way I use them against the unbelievers.

In addition, if "moron" and "feces" are so bad, why do we call unbelievers "sinners," and call them "sinful" or "wicked"? Even my critics use these words when preaching the gospel and when speaking to unbelievers. Do the biblical passages 1 Peter 3:15 and Colossians 4:5-6 suddenly cease to apply? Are my critics infallible exceptions too? How about the words "depravity" and "adultery"? Are these words full of "grace" and "salt"? How about telling someone that abortion is "murder"? Does that make someone feel all cozy from your "gentleness and respect"? Do you think that *these* words are not offensive to unbelievers? Do you think that *they* would prefer to be called "murderers" rather than "morons"?

Here we have come to the real issue – some Christians disagree with my use of invectives mainly because it offends *them*, and not because they are unbiblical (I have shown that they are biblical) or even because they offend the unbelievers (all biblical teachings offend unbelievers anyway). And these Christians are offended because their minds have not been taught and renewed in this area, so that their standards are still very much like those of the unbelievers; therefore, they are offended by the same things that offend the unbelievers. Another possibility is that at least some of these critics are still unconverted themselves,

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<sup>73</sup> These critics have also slandered the Reformers, who in the service of God and the Church, so faithfully and effectively employed invectives against unbelievers and heretics. Do you think that they were ignorant of 1 Peter 3:15 and Colossians 4:5-6? No, they did know about them, and wrote sermons and expositions on these verses. But unlike my critics, they also knew the contexts and the proper applications of these verses, and they also knew the rest of the Bible.

and since their priority is still man's dignity and not God's glory, then of course they are offended.

Because my critics have imposed their own definitions of these words on Scripture, they have created for themselves numerous theological problems and contradictions, and we have already mentioned their slanders and blasphemies. On the other hand, I have enough reverence for God to let the Scripture interpret itself; therefore, I affirm that using these *biblical* words (morons, feces, sinners, adulterers, murderers, etc.) in contexts similar to those in which they appear in Scripture is in complete accord with 1 Peter 3:15, Colossians 4:5-6, and all other related passages.

According to Scripture, unbelievers are nothing but spiritual and intellectual fecal matter. Otherwise, why in the world do you think they need to convert? Why do you think that they are helpless apart from God's sovereign grace?

## CONCLUSION

Under biblically-approved conditions, we are permitted, and at times even duty-bound, to use biblical invectives against unbelievers and heretics. We do not call them "morons" or "feces" out of personal vindictiveness, but to proclaim what Scripture says about them, and to declare to them that they are not the rational and decent people that they imagine themselves to be.

A moron by any other name is still an idiot, and there is really no reason to use other words and expressions unless it is to hide our true meaning and to reduce the offensiveness of the biblical message. But what perverse reason is there to obscure biblical teachings? The truth is that the critics of this approach are poor interpreters of Scripture, compromisers with the world, and traitors to Christ and his cause. They defy that which Christ approved and practiced. I dare not and wish not to defy my Lord, but I will crush his critics any day.

My critics select biblical passages containing words that *they think* agree with what they already consider as the right approach to apologetics (that is, non-offensive, socially polite discourse), rip them out of their original contexts, and try to bury me with them. Their teaching in this area is indeed very ingrained into the thinking of many believers, and it will take some deliberate effort for many to recover the biblical way of thinking and speaking. In a day when everything about Christianity is being diluted to nothing, I call upon all believers to recover the *proper* use of biblical invectives, and to learn how to integrate it into a faithful and effective system of biblical theology and apologetics.

I understand that my position on this issue is unpopular, but it is indeed biblical, and what is biblical is often unpopular. Although I am often criticized on this, I am not ashamed of biblical expressions and descriptions, and I will absolutely refuse to budge an inch on this issue. It is a believer's duty to carefully examine what he has been taught on this matter, and to reconsider the contexts of the verses traditionally used to oppose the invectives employed by the prophets, the apostles, the Lord Jesus, the Reformers, and that I now use.

Moreover, it is important to note that I try to use harsh words and insults only under similar contexts in which Scripture uses them. But in accepting the non-Christian standard of social propriety and in distorting a number of biblical passages, many Christians have come to the conclusion that this approach should never be used under any context, and thus they indirectly (but just as certainly) condemn the prophets, the apostles, and Christ himself, and in doing so, they have really condemned themselves.

The truth is that when I call someone a moron, I have at least momentarily spared him from the worst insult of all, an insult that represents all that is stupid, evil, filthy, and vile, and that speaks of someone who has no hope of getting better and no chance of escaping everlasting hellfire except by the sovereign grace of God. I am, of course, referring to the name "non-Christian." And once we have already used the greatest of insults, the rest are almost compliments.

## **29. Power Apologetics**

### **The Aggressive Vindication of the Faith**

#### **SCRIPTURE DISTORTED**

##### ***Unnatural Gentleness, Unfounded Respect***

Apologetics, in our context, refers to the intellectual defense of the Christian faith. I say that it is intellectual to distinguish it from military conquest and retaliation, political manipulation and legislation, or other such methods of securing agreement or surrender from those who oppose us. Our method is intellectual, in that our defense consists of verbal assertions, explanations, and arguments. We use words to talk about the Christian faith, and to show that it is true.

As for saying that it is a "defense," later we will discuss the possible problems with this characterization. Before we do that, we should first confront a subtle but crippling error that pervades almost all teachings on the subject of apologetics. The error is subtle not because it is difficult to detect, but it manages to hide in plain sight because it has become so popular that it is now accepted as truth, and it is even upheld as a nonnegotiable ethical standard for believers.

I am referring to the idea that when we defend the faith, we must do so with "gentleness and respect" toward the non-Christians. Since these words are taken from the apostle Peter, of course I agree with his teaching, but only when his meaning is correctly understood. The problem is that most instructors on apologetics fail to perceive or acknowledge Peter's meaning, so that they fail to pass on his teaching to believers. And the harder they teach it, the more they steer God's people away from the biblical approach to the defense of the faith.

The phrase appears in Peter's first letter, written to encourage and instruct believers who are suffering severe persecution for their faith. Thus the phrase does not stand in a vacuum. It serves the purpose of the letter, so that its meaning is determined by the context in which it appears. By observing the overall intention of the letter as well as the surrounding passages, we are able to infer Peter's intended meaning.

When we return to the letter with this in mind, we see that the "gentleness and respect" indeed fit into a broader teaching that Peter conveys to his readers. His main concern is to instruct believers in what to think and how to behave when they face persecution from authority figures. He refers to the king and to governors, and then to masters, and after that to husbands. He nowhere refers to the defense of the faith when it comes to discussion between peers, or in scholarly debates, or in the general publications of the Christian faith, such as in books and sermons.

Therefore, 1 Peter 3:15 refers to an interrogation of Christians about their faith by authority figures that hold formally superior positions in society. Christians are to be "always be prepared to give an answer" when questioned by government officials, masters or

employers, or husbands and parents, and so on. This does not mean that the verse is irrelevant to the defense of the faith before other kinds of people. But it does mean that if we are to release the verse from its original context in order to make a broader application, then we cannot do this to one part of the verse and not the other.

In other words, once we apply "always be prepared" to other situations, we also need to consider whether we still need to behave with "gentleness and respect," or a better way to say this is whether we need to behave with gentleness and respect in the same sense. This consideration is legitimate. To illustrate, Jesus did not speak to the Pharisees and to his disciples in the same way. And Paul did not defend the faith in the same way when he spoke to Agrippa as when he wrote to the Galatians. Likewise, it would be strange and unbiblical for a person to defend the faith in the same way when he speaks to a judge as when he speaks to his colleague or his infant son. The content of the faith remains the same, but the proper way to address people varies.

Peter indicates that he has different relationships and different categories of persons in mind when he writes, "Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17). This does not mean that the way we behave in these relationships are mutually exclusive. The point is that in this letter, Peter makes these distinctions and provides specific instructions for specific situations. Love toward God is legitimate, and fear toward the king is also legitimate, although even here both words are used in different senses already, so that even to acknowledge this is to make the point once again.

When interrogated by a government official, the Christian is to exhibit a gentleness and respect in honor of the office held by the one who questions him. There are exceptions to this, as when Elijah said to Ahab, "You are the problem!" or when Jesus publicly referred to Herod as, "That fox." Paul later cursed the high priest to his face, although when he did this, he did not know that he was speaking to the high priest. When he found out, he indicated that he did not know, implying that he might not have said the same thing if he had known. But remarkably, there is no record that he retracted his curse. That there are exceptions even to this rule for addressing authority figures reinforces my contention that the universal application of the "gentleness and respect" admonition is erroneous. And it is often taught in a way that would have us soften our tones and our words at all times and to all persons in such a manner that reduces apologetics to a rather effeminate and repulsive demonstration.

Nevertheless, Peter teaches believers to exercise wisdom and discretion when confronted by authority figures about their faith. To apply this in the broadest manner possible without first noting the specific context is defective exegesis, and an insult to divine inspiration. This does not mean that the Christian is to be a respecter of person, fearing the wealthy and powerful but scorning the ordinary inquirers. The reason for this attitude toward authority figures is because, as Paul teaches, all authorities are from God. No one who wields authority obtains his position except by divine providence. God is the source of the very ideas of authority and submission.



When the Christian answers authority with gentleness and respect, he does so because he is aware that the source of all authority is God. You respect the position given to the person by providence, while despising his ignorance and wickedness as a non-Christian. This is the apostle's teaching. But even this teaching gives the Christian boldness before authorities. When Pilate said to Jesus, "Don't you know who I am? Don't you know that I have the power to judge you, or to set you free?" Jesus replied that Pilate could have no power except what was given him from above. So the usual attitude taught is based on a misinterpretation of 1 Peter 3:15 and related verses, and a shallow understanding of what Scripture teaches about faith, humility, and respect. Because the popular understanding is false and shallow, it is useless and even harmful. We should throw it out.

If we consider the verse in a broader context, that is, from the perspective of the New Testament or even the whole Bible, then the error of the popular interpretation becomes even more glaring. We begin with the assumption that if the verse is understood in a way that would condemn the prophets and the apostles, and even the Lord Jesus himself, then it cannot be the correct interpretation. Anyone who reads the Bible can see that the prophets, the apostles, and the Lord Jesus often spoke and behaved in ways that contradicted the popular understanding of 1 Peter 3:15. The Lord Jesus called people snakes, dogs, hypocrites, sons of hell and sons of the devil, and even performed physically violent acts such as turning over tables and using a whip to chase merchants out of the temple.

Those who affirm the popular version of Christian ethics would give no place for the Lord's behavior, but would readily condemn him. And in condemning the Lord, they condemn themselves. As a Christian, I fully endorse the Lord's action. I wish not and dare not disagree with him. But all those who affirm the popular interpretation of 1 Peter 3:15 have no right to endorse the Lord at the same time. They must consider him a hypocrite, in which case they blaspheme the Lord and reject the Scripture's testimony concerning him, so that they renounce Christianity and show themselves as unbelievers and reprobates.

Or, if they do not do this, they must regard him as an exception to 1 Peter 3:15. They must say that the verse is not derived from the example of Jesus, but that it applies only to Christians. Even this is insufficient, since the prophets and the apostles also contradicted the popular understanding of 1 Peter 3:15, so that they must also be considered exceptions. Some people indeed teach this. Greg Bahnsen excuses the prophets, the apostles, and the Lord Jesus from 1 Peter 3:15 in precisely this manner in one of his lectures, saying that they were exceptions. At least he realized that they did not adhere to his interpretation of the verse.

However, this attempt to make their false interpretation of 1 Peter 3:15 consistent with the rest of the Bible betrays the fact that they have not understood or acknowledged even the surrounding passages. Peter repeatedly refers to the Lord's example throughout the letter, and it is on this basis that he gives the instruction to give an answer for the faith with gentleness and respect. So the Lord cannot be an exception because 1 Peter 3:15 is based on his example in the first place. And since this is the case, then the prophets and the apostles cannot be considered exceptions, since all of God's people must follow the

supreme example of Christ, as all of them are called to conform the image of God's Son. The popular interpretation of 1 Peter 3:15 is inconsistent with the immediate context of the verse, and it contradicts the rest of Scripture. Therefore, it must be false.

Since the prophets, the apostles, and the Lord Jesus could not be exceptions, this interpretation encourages both Christians and non-Christians to condemn them as hypocrites, since there is no way that anyone can twist the facts to make them fit the popular interpretation of 1 Peter 3:15. They violated the false interpretation with regularity and with no remorse. In fact, they appeared completely unaware of any moral regulation requiring them to show gentleness and respect in the sense meant by the popular interpretation. So, who are the true guardians of the faith? The prophets, the apostles, and the Lord Jesus, or those who tell you to be soft and polite when talking with unbelievers, and not to follow the numerous examples of the inspired preachers that demonstrated the exact opposite?

On the other hand, if we understand the verse to say that we must show respect when under interrogation by authority figures, then the problem disappears. And given the context in which the verse appears, this is the obvious and only possible meaning. As mentioned, even then, there are indeed apparent exceptions to even this principle, so that at times the prophets, the apostles, and the Lord Jesus appeared to show no respect at all to the authority figures. Unlike the false interpretation of 1 Peter 3:15, the legitimacy of these exceptions is not invented to preserve a semblance of consistency, but it is explicitly granted in Scripture, as when Peter indicated under interrogation that he ought to obey God rather than men. So these exceptions are not arbitrary, but clearly defined and explained. Moreover, these exceptions do not help the opposing view, that is, the popular interpretation, since the consideration of these exceptions occur after it has been established that 1 Peter 3:15 refers to showing respect to those in authority. The legitimate exceptions appear within a narrow context with clearly defined principles that explain when they should be done.

The truth is obvious. Those who insist on the basis of 1 Peter 3:15 that we must always perform apologetics with "gentleness and respect" – that is, with what *they* mean by gentleness and respect, which does not always conform to the biblical meaning – assert nothing more than their own opinion about the appropriate manner in which religious dialogues should be conducted. They are not really concerned about what Peter says and what he means. They just want to find words in the Bible that would support their own attitude on the matter, which amounts to, 1. You should do apologetics, and 2. You should be nice while doing it. This cheap distortion of Peter's teaching subverts the apostle's intention in encouraging and instructing believers who live under severe persecution. Those who promote this deception should be held accountable.

## **CHRIST BETRAYED**

### ***Faithless Honesty, Counterfeit Humility***

We have been talking about the kind of false humility that pertains to our attitude in defending the faith. It is a product of the misinterpretations of 1 Peter 3:15 and other verses,

of unbiblical religious traditions, and of adopting non-Christian standards for social intercourse and surrendering to non-Christian demands as to how they ought to be treated.

Although this false humility has inflicted far-reaching damage, there is another kind that poses an even greater danger. This is the false humility that discourages complete certainty regarding the truth of the gospel, or the actual content of our faith. There are those who promote this view about the faith even as they claim to defend it. And some of them would suggest that it is dishonest and arrogant to affirm and to present the gospel as if we possess total certainty that it is true. They claim that honesty and humility require us to acknowledge that our faith in the Lord Jesus could be entirely misguided, in the sense that the Christian faith itself could be wrong.

This false humility that affects the certainty with which one affirms and presents the content of the Christian faith could be based on a belief about the appropriate attitude that one should assume, or it could be the result of a person's philosophical judgment. Since I wish to focus on this problem of equating the admission of uncertainty to honesty and humility instead of why one would come to make such an admission, the reason for the admission of uncertainty is irrelevant to this discussion. However, since it is important to the defense of the faith in general, I will make a brief statement about it.

If one makes an admission to uncertainty because he thinks that a humble attitude necessarily produces this behavior, then I have already refuted this. But if a person makes this admission because it is the result of his philosophical judgment, then this becomes a matter of rational argument, and the answer is that no one can produce an argument that casts any doubt upon any aspect of the Christian faith. We are able to refute any such attempt without any difficulty or hesitation. Further, the biblical defense of the faith that I have outlined in various places preempt such an attempt.

On the final page of his book, *Humble Apologetics*, John G. Stackhouse, Jr. writes, "We Christians do believe that God has given us the privilege of hearing and embracing the good news, of receiving adoption into his family, and of joining the Church. We do believe that we know some things that other people don't, and those things are good for them to hear. Above all, we believe that we have met Jesus Christ." This is fine, but then he continues, "For all we know, we might be wrong about any or all of this. And we will honestly own up to that possibility. Thus whatever we do or say, we must do or say it humbly."<sup>74</sup>

He has stated some of the central claims of the Christian faith, and he claims to affirm these claims as true. So when he says that "we might be wrong about any or all of this," he necessarily implies that Scripture itself might be wrong about any or all of this, that the entire Christian faith could be wrong. However, since the Bible itself does not admit that it "might be wrong about any or all of this," when Stackhouse says that he "might be wrong about any or all of this," he is no longer defending the Bible.

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<sup>74</sup> John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today*; Oxford University Press, 2002; p. 232.

He might place the emphasis on his own fallibility, that he himself might be wrong about the belief that the Bible is God's revelation, but this makes little difference, since it still returns to the point that if this is what he means, then he is no longer defending the Bible. He says that he might be wrong when he says that the Bible is right, which is the same as if he says that the Bible might be wrong. Because he says that he might be wrong when he says the Bible is true, so that the Bible might be false after all, he is no longer doing biblical apologetics.

The Bible says that when we affirm the things that it teaches, we can know with certainty that the things that we believe are true (Luke 1:3-4; John 17:6-8; Hebrews 11:1, 6). Christian apologetics is supposed to defend what the Christian faith teaches, and since the Christian faith does not say concerning itself that it might be wrong, when Stackhouse says that it might be wrong, he is no longer defending the Christian faith, but more than that, he is attacking it.

If the Bible itself claims to be God's revelation and therefore completely true, then by what standard of humility does Stackhouse call his approach "humble"? Since the Bible is the ultimate standard of ethics, it also defines humility; therefore, when Stackhouse implies that the Bible itself might be wrong, he is not being humble, but arrogant – so arrogant that he says he might be wrong if he affirms what God reveals. According to biblical standard, it is not humble to say that you might be wrong when you affirm what the Bible affirms; instead, you are arrogant if you say that the Bible might be wrong.

For Stackhouse to claim to be a Christian and then say that his religion might be wrong is to say that Christianity might be wrong; therefore, instead of doing apologetics – humble or not – he is in fact attacking Christianity. If the Bible is the word of God, then to say that we might be wrong about it being the word of God is not humility, but blasphemy. If Stackhouse admits that he himself *does not* have certainty, then we may perhaps still accept him as a weaker brother, but when he says that we *should not* ever claim certainty, and even suggests that anyone who does is dishonest and arrogant, then he has made himself an enemy of Christ.

Rather than saying that we must "own up to that possibility" that we might be wrong, we must insist on the impossibility that we are wrong when we are affirming what the Bible teaches. When we affirm what the Bible affirms, it is impossible that we are wrong. If Stackhouse is so "humble," he must also confess that he might be wrong when he says that he might be wrong about Christianity, for how can he be so sure there is "that possibility" that Christians can be wrong who affirm the Bible? Is he fallible when he affirms the Bible, but infallible when it comes to "that possibility"?

Man's arrogance is revealed in his modest theology. The arrogant man's confidence in his faith is in direct proportion to his confidence in himself, in his own estimation regarding his own intelligence and competence. Since this self-confidence, even if unrealistically large, is not absolute and infinite, then his "faith" must also be accordingly limited. His plea for humility is in fact a plea for removing God's infallible revelation as the basis for faith, and to replace it with man's arrogance as the only foundation for confidence in his

religion. The basis for his apologetics is self-worship. Stackhouse's approach to apologetics does not display the power and wisdom of God, but his inferior intellect and personal crisis of faith.

His position is unbiblical, irrational, and blasphemous; therefore, we must reject this false humility and scholarship in exchange for an approach to apologetics that is biblical, which is one that says, "We are right, and we are sure that we are right. You are wrong, and we are sure that you are wrong." If this biblical position brings the world's reproach, then so be it – let the unbelievers try to defeat us in argumentation.

He says, "For all we know, we might be wrong about any or all of this." For all *we* know? Who gives him the right to speak for us? He should speak for himself. Unless he can defeat me in argumentation, proving that it is possible that the Christian faith is wrong, he cannot speak for me. For all I know, it is impossible that I might be wrong about any or all of this. And Stackhouse should honestly own up to that possibility that I am right, and that it is impossible that the Christian faith is wrong.

Then, notice that he makes the possibility of error the basis for humility: "We might be wrong... Thus whatever we do or say, we must do or say it humbly." This makes us wonder why Jesus was so humble. In any case, this is not the biblical basis for humility. The Bible does not say that we must be humble because the Bible itself might be wrong. In fact, if the Bible itself might be wrong, then it cannot be an infallible authority by which humility is commanded, since such a command might itself be wrong, so that perhaps arrogance instead of humility is the virtue to pursue.

Since Stackhouse makes human fallibility instead of divine command the basis of humility, this humility is independent of his alleged belief in the Christian faith. In other words, he can be humble in the sense intended whether or not he is a Christian. Therefore, he is referring to a non-Christian humility. But if this humility is not based on divine command, then what difference does it make whether I am humble or arrogant, even by this non-Christian definition? Would Christ judge me for not showing a *non-Christian* humility? Would Christ rebuke me, and say, "Do not be so sure when you exalt my name before the heathens"? What, are you insane? And if Christ is false, then no one could judge me for not showing any kind or any degree of humility. Either way, Stackhouse's version of humility is complete rubbish.

God does not send us out to proclaim a mere possibility for people to consider or investigate, but he commands all men everywhere to repent. This call to repentance carries authority and significance because the whole Christian faith is true. God does not send us out to tell people that we might be wrong, but rather, that we are right, that we are certain that we are right, and that we are certain that we are the only ones who are right. If you want to preach your own unbiblical opinion, then feel free to be "humble" about it, and feel free to say that you might be wrong. But when you claim to proclaim and defend the message of Christ, then it is not up to you to be modest about it.

An ambassador who represents his king when he addresses another nation operates with the full authority of the king within the boundaries defined for him by the king. That is, he speaks for the king within certain contexts and situations. It is not up to him to doubt the king, or to criticize or incite opposition against the king. For him to do so would amount to treason, and depending on the policy of his home country, the ambassador could be removed from office, imprisoned, or even executed. The monarch would be within his rights to parade this traitor through the streets while his people curse him and spit on him, and then to behead him in the city square.

The kingdom of God is no less a kingdom than any earthly kingdom, and Jesus Christ is no less a king than any earthly king. For Stackhouse to advocate a policy of apologetics that introduces uncertainty and fallibility to the Christian faith is treason against the kingdom, the king, and all his people. And the fact that he announces this policy as a Christian professor and a public figure makes the matter much worse. For this reason, Stackhouse should be removed from all positions in any Christian seminary, church, or organization, and he should stand under official church discipline, which should implement anything from a rebuke, and if he exhibits no repentance and issues no public retraction, he should be excommunicated.

Lest it appears that Stackhouse is used as a special target here, I mean that any Christian who advocates such an approach to apologetics should be treated in the same manner. In fact, all believers and organizations who do not affirm and implement such a firm policy against spiritual traitors share in their guilt. They care more about the comfort and friendship of men than the honor of Christ. If you are one of these people, repent! Flee to Christ for mercy, for he said that it would be better for you to tie a boulder around your neck and throw yourself into the sea, than to cause one of his little ones to stumble. You should rather kill yourself than to undermine a believer's confidence in the Christian faith. Jesus said it, and I am happy to repeat it. In the name of the Lord Jesus, I condemn Stackhouse's "humble apologetics," as well as all its variations, no matter who advocates it, as long as it suggests that we should admit that we might be in error when we confess the truth of the Christian faith. I demand that you do the same.

If you confess that you have doubts about the Christian faith, then that is your problem. It is a problem of ignorance, of irrationality, of deficiency in your righteousness and intelligence. What you need is prayer, study, counseling, and divine grace for your soul. It takes a special brand of hypocrite to translate this defective faith into an approach to apologetics, and then to enshrine it and call it humility. You introduce doubt to the people of God, and insinuate rebellion into their hearts. You are a wolf in sheep's clothing, undermining the confidence of the faithful, while excusing the sons of hell. Shame on you. May your humility burn in hell, because it proceeds from the limitation and the arrogance of man, and not the revelation of God.

People who called themselves Christians have criticized me for stating that I am invincible in the defense of the faith. Although I always explain that this is because I derive my arguments from divine revelation, and revelation is invincible, just as God is invincible. And I always insist that any believer who would likewise stand on revelation is also

invincible in argumentation, because even the foolishness of God is greater than the wisdom of men. This explanation is ignored by my critics, because they always stand upon their own merits, and their confidence is only as extensive as their estimation of their own abilities. For them, the self is the ultimate reference of what is true, of what is possible, of what is great and what is not.

When I say that I am invincible, I am saying something about God, not something about me. Although this should be every believer's attitude, it is inconceivable to some people that anyone would think this way, probably because they themselves think in a thoroughly self-centered and self-righteous manner. This is the basis of their confidence, and since they are limited, they think that to acknowledge this limitation is the essence of humility. They measure everything by their own merits and abilities. So when someone says that he is invincible, even though he clearly credits this to Christ, they cannot help but think that he claims to be invincible in himself and because of himself. Because they do not think as Christians should, they deny that anyone does. The Bible teaches that he who boasts should boast in the Lord, but these people think that if a man boasts, let him boast about himself or not at all.

True humility recognizes that without Christ we are not just limited, but that we are nothing and can do nothing, so that we should have no confidence in ourselves at all. Rather, we look to him to grant us wisdom and power, so that our measure of faith in his abilities and our estimation of his greatness become the measure of our confidence. This is the basis of my claim that I cannot be defeated by non-Christians, and that I am invincible in the vindication of the Christian faith. We have to own up to the reality that, when we affirm the Christian faith, we are affirming something that is true, that is certain, that is beautiful and glorious, and that is invincible in argumentation.

## **THE READY ANSWER**

### ***Defend, Attack, and Reaffirm***

The word "apologetics" is derived from the Greek *apologia*, which is often translated as "answer" or "defense." It refers to an intellectual answer or defense, so that the one presenting it does so by using words, by submitting evidences, and by providing arguments. The classic illustration for this is the court trial, in which the accused, or the defendant, is expected to issue an "answer" in response to the charges made against him. The Bible commands us to answer the world, and this suggests that there is an intellectual dimension to the Christian faith. Christianity involves learning, thinking, believing, knowing, speaking, and writing. There are facts, claims, and propositions that we must grasp and apply. This is a defining characteristic of biblical apologetics.

This is accurate as far as it goes; however, the idea that apologetics is an answer or defense could be misunderstood. To be more precise, those who are careless about what an answer or defense means might misunderstand what it is that the Bible commands Christians to do. This misunderstanding has turned the practice of apologetics into a passive and defensive discipline that is propelled by reactions to attacks from the unbelievers.

Some Christians seem to think that we are to put ourselves at the disposal of unbelievers, always ready to react whenever they express their curiosity or animosity, and to do this in a way that yields to the particular manner in which each inquiry takes shape. For the Christians who think this way, the result is that the unbelievers have exercised excessive control over their agendas and activities, and even the form and content of their apologetics.

This false view regards apologetics as mainly a defensive discipline, always reacting to non-Christian intellectual aggression. To "answer" the unbelievers would mean neutralizing objections and correcting misunderstandings, but it would not include a merciless and relentless assault against non-Christian beliefs. That is, this view of apologetics understands an "answer" as mainly defensive, not offensive, and mainly as a response, not as something that we initiate. Their false interpretation of Peter's instruction to answer with gentleness and respect reinforces this position for them.

Of course, there are those who hold to this idea of apologetics for reasons other than a false interpretation of 1 Peter 3:15, but the misinterpretation of this verse has indeed been a contributing factor to the false humility that has so crippled the church's apologetic endeavor. Moreover, even for those who have arrived at this passive and defensive view of apologetics because of other reasons, a true understanding of 1 Peter 3:15, and of what it means to provide an "answer" to unbelievers, will still be sufficient to offer a biblical corrective.

There is nothing in the idea of an "answer" that requires us to be only defensive, or even mainly defensive. The nature of the answer depends on the content of what we are answering for and what we believe to be the reasons that constitute the answer. When a non-Christian demands to know the reason I am justified in affirming the Christian faith, and why it is reasonable for me to be a believer, part of my answer is that there is something wrong with him, that is, with the unbeliever who asks me this. Part of my answer is that any person who is a non-Christian is immoral and irrational. Since I do not wish to be like him, and since I perceive that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Christ, I am justified in affirming the Christian faith. Part of my answer is that God will throw the unbeliever into a lake of fire. Since I do not wish to suffer a fate like his, and since I perceive that Christ was made sin, although he did no sin, so that in him I might be made the righteousness of God, I look to him for salvation – for deliverance from divine wrath, and for the hope of eternal life and glory.

This is an integral and necessary aspect of my answer, my defense. This is what I believe, so this is what I tell him. As it is written, "I have believed, and therefore have I spoken." We also believe, and therefore speak. Thus even a defense does not need to be only defensive. The fact that Peter calls on us to provide an answer or a defense is the biblical basis for incorporating an offensive and aggressive element in our apologetics. We are to attack the people that we answer. We might also call the practice of apologetics the *vindication* of the Christian faith. The word makes room for both the defensive and offensive aspects of our engagement with non-Christians. Nevertheless, the words "answer" and "defense" are accurate if all their implications are understood.



Consider again the illustration of a court trial. It is common for the defense to attack the prosecution in the process of arguing for the innocence of the accused. This is done not necessarily as a diversion, since the strength of the prosecution's case is indeed relevant to the burden placed on the defense and the success of the defense. So the defense would attempt to dismantle the prosecution's case by discrediting the witnesses, by offering alternate explanations for the evidences, by refuting the reasoning and the inferences of the prosecution, by exposing the inconsistency of their arguments and testimonies, and even by drawing attention to some broader issues such as the reliability of memory and of sensation.

All these aggressive tactics legitimately belong to the arsenal of legal defense, or any rational defense of a position. In fact, the defense would be foolish and even unethical for failing to attack the vulnerabilities in the prosecution's case. And if the prosecution's case is mostly based on conjectures, false inferences, inconsistent testimonies, and arbitrary accusations, then it is conceivable that much of the defense's arguments would be of the aggressive kind.

The illustration shows that to be on the defense does not necessarily mean to be always on the defensive. But later I will show that the place of a defendant does not fully reflect the situation of the Christian, and that there is an even greater justification, even an obligation, for assuming an aggressive posture when it comes to apologetics. Remember that 1 Peter 3:15 mainly deals with how a Christian should behave under official interrogation, and it is not the only verse in the Bible that has to do with apologetics.

There are numerous biblical examples to reinforce the point. Once I point out a few of them, you should be able to notice many others.

The first example comes from Luke 11, from the ministry of Jesus. He was a walking tsunami of divine power, an avalanche of signs and wonders. The Gospels record only a very small percentage of the miracles he performed. John wrote that if all his works (including miracles) were recorded in writing, perhaps the world would not be enough to contain the books that would be produced. Even if we take this as a hyperbole, and even if we take into account the much larger and more cumbersome scrolls and parchments that were used at that time, it would not stretch the imagination to suppose that Jesus performed thousands of miracles, even tens of thousands, if not more. This is more than plausible. He would at times heal entire crowds with a word of command, and sometimes he would spend all night laying hands on the sick. So his healing miracles alone would number in the thousands. It would be impossible for the number to be smaller.

His adversaries were envious because he was attracting many followers, and he was liberating these people from false traditions and authorities. But the sheer number and magnitude of his miracles made his power undeniable. Therefore, as religious reprobates often do, they resorted to slander, and said that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Satan, the devil. No one could accuse him of error in his doctrine or behavior, so the charge that he wielded demonic power was groundless. Nevertheless, this is the nature of slander, that it is irrational and without justification.

Demonology is not the main issue here. We are interested in Jesus' answer, his defense, to this accusation.

First, he exposed the fallacy in the accusation, showing that it was irrational. He said that Satan's kingdom cannot be divided against itself and remain standing (v. 17-18). This in itself was an indirect attack against his critics, since objections do not appear out of nowhere – they are formulated by people. Irrational people make irrational statements. Unintelligent people make unintelligent criticisms. So the way he neutralized the accusation made his critics appear ignorant and foolish. In this case, they were either ignorant of the operation of Satan's kingdom, or they failed to make valid inferences from what they knew. If he had pressed this point, this maneuver that neutralized the objection would have also become a direct attack.

Next, he indeed made a direct attack against his critics. He said that if he drove out demons by the power of the devil, then, "By whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges" (v. 19). Although the theology is important, that is not our main interest at this time, so we shall focus on the rational and rhetorical tactic that Jesus used. After he neutralized their accusation with a proper application of biblical demonology, he returned the burden of the argument to his critics, and challenged their own practices. He even set fire to their own camp, by exposing the conflict that would arise among themselves if the accusation were allowed to stand. He went on the offensive.

Finally, he offered a positive answer, and said, "But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (v. 20). He affirmed that he could drive out demons, but he did not do this by the power of the devil. Rather, he did it by the finger of God, or the Spirit of God. And then he used this last point to drive across his message, that "the kingdom of God has come to you." He used the opportunity to reaffirm his mission and to preach the gospel. "Now if I cast out demons by the power of God," he said in effect, "then the kingdom of God is here. God's rule has come. God's time has come. God's Son has come! What are you going to do about it? Will you continue to invent irrational criticisms and unjustified accusations, or will you repent of your sins, and rejoice that the kingdom has come to you, and enter in through faith and thanksgiving?"

His answer, therefore, consisted of an analysis of the accusation, neutralizing it in the process, a destructive attack against his opponents, forcing the burden back on to them through it, and a constructive statement of the truth about himself and his message, by which he reaffirms his mission and furthers his own agenda. The vindication of the faith would be far more faithful and effective if we would follow this approach. We must do more than to make a constructive statement. We must do more than to neutralize the objection. We must also pursue the heretics, and attack the unbelievers.

In Acts 2, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, and as the Spirit enabled them, they spoke in languages that they had never learned, declaring the wonders of God. The Jews were bewildered, and some of them said that these Christians were drunk with wine. At this, Peter rose to speak.

He first weakened the accusation by noting that it was implausible (v. 15). Then he offered a constructive statement (v. 16-36). This included an alternate explanation of the occurrence, that it was a fulfillment of prophecy (v. 16-21). This then turned into a proclamation of the gospel, the person and work of Christ, which was supported by arguments from prophecy, history, and testimony.

Embedded within this constructive statement was an attack against the critics, the Jews. Peter said that they murdered Jesus with the help of the Romans. So they called the disciples drunks, but he called them murderers. They did not ask him this, but Peter brought it up. But unlike their accusation against the Christians, Peter's accusation against them was based on truth and not slander, not misunderstanding or misrepresentation. And those Jews who repented acknowledged this, and were cut to the heart.

So the same three elements that were present in Jesus' defense were also present in Peter's answer.

Then, in Acts 7, Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin on charges that he spoke against the temple and the law. The high priest asked him if the charges were true, and so Stephen gave his answer, his defense. Read it. You will notice the same three elements in his reply.

We might call his answer a redemptive-historical analysis. He began with God's calling of Abraham, and then Isaac, then Jacob, after that, Joseph. But he gave the greatest attention to Moses. And it is in this section on Moses that he neutralized the accusation brought against him. Then he also mentioned Joshua, David, and Solomon.

The conclusion included a constructive statement about "the Righteous One" predicted by the prophets. This final section also included an attack against his accusers. Although his entire account illustrated the Jewish people's rebellion and hardness of heart, he made the theme explicit at the end: "You always resisted the Holy Spirit!" They claimed to honor the prophets, but they were the ones who persecuted them. They claimed to honor the law, but they disobeyed it. And he said that now they had even murdered Jesus Christ, their own Messiah. He was the accused, but he ended up making a stronger attack against his accusers than the one they made against him. They accused him of sacrilege, but he charged them with generations of sacrilege and murder.

Paul's speech before the Areopagus in Acts 17 is often misrepresented. Some commentators claim that he flattered the Greeks and appealed to common beliefs to introduce the Christian faith to them. I have written an extensive exposition showing that Paul did the very opposite,<sup>75</sup> so I will not investigate the details with you here, but we will focus on the three elements of a Christian answer.

The whole speech, of course, was a constructive statement. It is similar in structure and content to a course in systematic theology, in which we begin from Scripture, to God, creation, providence, to man and sin, and then to Christ, redemption, and judgment. The

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<sup>75</sup> Vincent Cheung, *Presuppositional Confrontations*.

popular assertion that Paul was not a systematic theologian is contradicted by explicit biblical accounts. Paul was not only a systematic theologian, but the content that he treated and the order in which he treated them were almost identical to many of our textbooks in systematic theology.

Although most systematic theologians did not derive their outlines from Paul, they ended up following approximately the same order, treating the same subjects. This is because systematic theology follows the logical order and observes the logical relationships of the doctrines that it considers, and therefore those who can think logically will arrive at approximately the same result. As with us, at times Paul presented his theology in a different arrangement, but the subjects treated remained the same, only that his purpose required him to arrange his material in another manner.<sup>76</sup>

Although the speech was a kind of answer about the Christian faith, the situation was different, in that Paul was not confronted with the same kind of hostile accusations that we found in our other examples, and that the Greeks were curious about what he had to say. Nevertheless, we could still find the element of neutralizing an objection. That is, the Greeks suspected Paul of introducing "bad philosophy" to them, and his answer showed that his philosophy was a broad, coherent, and superior worldview, thus neutralizing their initial accusation.

And he attacked the Greeks even at the beginning of his speech. He took their altar to "An Unknown God" as an admission of their ignorance. So he undermined them from the start and claimed to speak from a superior position. Later into the speech he attacked their idolatry by noting that the divine being could not be represented by gold or silver or stone. They were the ones who practiced bad philosophy. He called them ignorant, and said that God now commands all people everywhere to repent.

Thus the Christian answer to the unbelievers includes three elements. First, we are to neutralize the objections. Second, we are to provide a constructive statement that explains our beliefs and that provides rational support for them. This is to reaffirm and reassert the Christian faith, and to further our own agenda, so that the objections would not remove our focus on our mission. Third, we are to fiercely attack the non-Christians – their beliefs, their intelligence, and their character. We are to expose everything that is wrong about them.

The prophets, the apostles, and the Lord Jesus all employed this method. A method of apologetics that does not attack the unbelievers is not only incomplete, but because it is incomplete, also irresponsible, and because it is irresponsible, it is also sinful. It is a sin to not attack the unbelievers with all our powers and resources. Some Christians would rather attack believers who follow this method than to attack the non-Christians. This is treason against the kingdom of heaven.

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<sup>76</sup> For example, Paul summarizes his system of theology with christology as the motif in his letter to the Colossians. See Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Colossians*.

## THE SPIRIT SWORD

### *Reason, Rhetoric, and Power*

The Bible tells us that we have the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. This metaphor is relevant because it applies to spiritual conflict, which is what happens when a battle of ideas rages between Christians and non-Christians. If our approach to apologetics invokes the word of God, then when unbelievers challenge us, our answer will involve plunging this weapon straight into their hearts. This is a war, and your duty is clear. When you face a non-Christian opponent, you must hurt him. You must attack his pride. You must damage his confidence. You must destroy that which he believes and trusts in. Then you must declare his defeat, and show the world that you have put him under your feet in the name of Christ.

If we will adopt this biblical approach to apologetics when confronting unbelievers or when confronted by them, then they will never be the same. The gospel spells their defeat, their death, their eternal doom. If they refuse to repent, then their darkness will get darker, their hearts will grow harder. They will lose that much more of their sanity and their humanity. They will become even more stupid, and even more evil. They will die in their deaths. As for those whom God has chosen and enabled to believe, he will raise them from the dead and awaken them to righteousness. Either way, once the word of God penetrates, they will never be the same.

A sword implies blood, violence, offense, and conquest. We condemn ourselves if we confess that the word of God is the sword of the Spirit, but at the same time fail to give proper place to the offensive nature of our work. We say that we believe the Great Commission, but insofar as the preaching of the gospel propagates ideas that contradict what the non-Christians believe, the offensive aspect of our work in fact precedes any defensive measure. If we are silent about what we believe, or if we hold our sword in its sheath, though its lively nature protests all suppression, then there would be nothing for the unbelievers to challenge. The fact that they demand an answer or defense from us presupposes that we, or more faithful soldiers than we, have already taken the offensive.

The sword of the Spirit is sheathed in truth, which the Bible likens to a belt that holds other items in place. This weapon of attack is drawn from the truth, out of the truth. In more concrete terms, it is derived or deduced from the Bible. Since this relation obtains, if the sword signifies particular and agile applications, then the belt could refer to the whole biblical system of doctrine. The constant pursuit and growth in the disciplines of systematic theology, of biblical theology, of general biblical knowledge, and of particular biblical passages, strengthen our belt and sharpen our sword.

How grateful I am to the Lord when I look over at my opponents, and also a little amused. They are unkempt, undressed, and unarmed. Some tremble, as they ought. But some are confident – those are the delusional ones, for they have no sense to perceive that a greater one stands before them in the name of Christ. He has not left me unprepared, but has ensured that I am well-trained and well-equipped. He has given me the assurance that I shall win every time, if I will only fight, and slay his enemies with decisive strokes of the sword.

It is agreed among Christians that truth is our foundation, our center, and the source of our thinking. It is doubtful that anyone who does not agree with this is a Christian at all. Thus we draw our presuppositions, doctrines, and arguments from the truth, that is, from the Scripture. However, it is not agreed as to how truth is to be applied and defended. The approach to apologetics that I denounce here has resulted from a false understanding of what it means to provide an answer or defense to those who inquire, and what it means and in what context to do this with "gentleness and respect."

This false understanding is in turn a result of a disinterest in what Peter really has to say, and a pursuit of a private agenda, namely, to assert an approach to social discourse and interaction that pleases the sentimentalities and cultural standards of non-Christians. Of course, the distortion of Peter's words is not the only factor contributing to this pagan approach, but the verse is a good and prominent example among others that have been similarly abused. This has resulted in an unbiblical restraint in two main areas of apologetics.

First, the unbiblical approach to apologetics places a restraint on reason. Christians sometimes exhibit an aversion to "reason," in part because they are confused and disobedient, but in part because the word is often loaded with assumptions that believers should not accept. Whether consciously or instinctively, sometimes Christians detect these assumptions, and rather than challenge them, they become hostile to reason itself. And thus the unbelievers call the Christians unreasonable or irrational. However, it is not reason itself that we need to be wary of, but these assumptions.

For example, rationalism is the way of thinking that claims to utilize reason to discover and to deduce an entire system of truth, with a conscious rejection of revelation from the start. Of course Christians cannot accept this, and no thinking person should. Or, empiricism is often identified with reason. Since the scientific method involves a deliberate application of empirical methods and assumptions, science is often identified with reason as well. But again, it is not necessary to identify empiricism and science with reason.

Instead, reason can refer to the bare laws of logic, the principles that describe the necessary rules of thought. For example, two propositions must not contradict each other. Or, when one item is equal to another, and the second is equal to the third, then the first is also equal to the third. Basic principles like these also form the basis for delineating the forms that valid arguments must take. These are necessary rules of thought that one must follow whether or not we spell them out. And men instinctively and necessarily use them as they speak and debate with one another.

From the Christian perspective, reason is a description of the way God thinks. It is the way he structures creation, and the way he structures his revelation. Thus a rock cannot be a rock and not a rock at the same time and in the same sense. And the Bible assumes the necessity of logic in its teachings and arguments. For example, Jesus assumes that the Bible cannot contradict itself when he contested with Satan, and there is no record that the devil himself argued with him about it. Then, he also used the same principle to confound the

Pharisees, as when he noted that the Messiah was to be both the son and the lord of David. The writings of the prophets and the apostles are also full of arguments that assume the laws of logic.

There is nothing wrong with reason itself, if we will remove the unnecessary assumptions from it. And when we do so, we find that reason is an unstoppable weapon in the hands of a Christian. For example, we find that all of science crumbles within several seconds when tested by reason. Of course, if we identify science with reason, then we might not say this, since science would be reason. But if we take reason to mean logic without the baggage of unnecessary assumptions, then the claim that science is rational is annihilated. This is because of its reliance on induction, sensation, and the formal fallacy of asserting the consequent in its thinking and procedures. Any one of these three items would destroy the claim that science is even a little bit rational. Science is only a sophisticated and systematized version of irrationalism.

If we will press this point in apologetics, then all scientific objections against the Christian faith would be destroyed even before they are examined. The method of science destroys itself, and prevents it from discovering anything about reality. The usual approach in apologetics is to flatter science, and to say that it can indeed discover truth if it is properly conducted. Then the defense of the gospel turns into a debate about science, and thus the unbeliever neutralizes the Christian's purpose regardless of the outcome of the debate. The kingdom of heaven makes no progress.

Even the popular version of presuppositional apologetics endorses science, although it teaches that we cannot account for it without biblical presuppositions. But this is even more ridiculous. Science is irrational *in itself*, which means that no set of presuppositions can justify it or account for it, except to account for its falsehood. Therefore, this form of presuppositional apologetics makes the Bible an accomplice to a lie. Rather than to defend the faith, it commits blasphemy. Reason belongs to the Christians. We must not let non-Christians hijack it by loading it with their private assumptions. They claim reason for themselves. I am taking it back.

Some Christians have used the informal fallacies to illustrate Scripture's disagreement with reason. But the informal fallacies are themselves applications of reason, and do not strictly belong to reason itself. These applications might be right, or they might be wrong. For example, the informal fallacy of name-calling points to a genuine logical problem only when it is reduced to a fallacy of irrelevance. That is, if one person insults another with a name or label that is irrelevant to the debate, and if he utters the insult as if it is relevant, then it is a logical fallacy. But there is no logical problem in the act of name-calling itself.

In fact, if the name-calling proceeds from the person's worldview, then it is a necessary part of what needs to be discussed. For example, Scripture uses the words "sinners," "fools," "dogs," "snakes," and the like to describe unbelievers. If the Christian avoids using them, then he is no longer speaking for the Christian faith. So in these cases, the insults are not informal fallacies, but part of the Christian worldview. This is what we believe – we believe that the non-Christians are sinners, fools, dogs, and so on. And if the non-Christian

disagrees with these characterizations, then that is part of his worldview. The conflict now becomes more clear, and the debate can become more relevant and productive as a result.

Second, the unbiblical approach to apologetics places a restraint on rhetoric. This is another loaded word. It is often associated with sophistry, or a skillful use of language for the purpose of deception or manipulation. This is not what I mean. When emptied of these assumptions, the word can simply refer to an effective use of language, or skill in speaking or writing. The purpose is to bring clarity into our communication, and to bring out the force inherent in our beliefs.

Words are symbols that convey ideas. The symbols are not associated with the ideas by necessity, since one symbol can represent an idea just as well as another. So it does not matter which symbols we use to represent our ideas. But once the symbols are associated with the ideas, then it matters which symbols we use when we communicate our ideas, since the different symbols now represent different ideas. Then, the tone, style, and structure of our communication also affect the precise nuances of the ideas communicated. Thus rhetoric is not for mere effect.

In apologetics, the Christian is to use all the rhetorical devices, forms, styles, and expressions exhibited in Scripture. Many of these are not opposed by believers and teachers in apologetics, but others are denounced as harsh and unloving, even though they come from Scripture. As mentioned, rhetoric cannot be entirely divorced from content, so that to oppose the rhetoric of Scripture is to oppose its content. Scripture denounces sin, but it does this in certain tones, using certain words, and with certain attitudes. If we retain what we think are the ideas expressed, but use only the tones and the words that unbelievers do not find offensive, then we are still not telling the world what the Scripture really says, or what the Christian worldview really is. In addition, the language of Scripture also evokes a certain response. If you change the language, you change the response. Therefore, to present or defend the gospel in this manner is unbiblical and unsatisfactory.

The rejection of biblical rhetoric is a liability in debate, and it is a sin before God, since it implies shame or contempt regarding his word. May God liberate his people from the human traditions that forbid them to follow the Bible in both its content and its language, in both its reason and its rhetoric. It does not matter how many of you are on the other side of this issue. You are wrong. And you cannot fight God and win. My Father is greater than all. As for those who have ears to hear, you are free to speak and write the way that the prophets did it, the way the apostles did it, and the way the Lord Jesus did it. Do not let religious traditions or cultural standards hinder you from following the word of God. Unless you shake yourself from these, you will not find freedom in wielding the sword of the Spirit.

We are to throw off all restraints that limit our use of reason and rhetoric to attack the non-Christians, to criticize their way of life, and to destroy everything that they believe in.

The sword of the Spirit is a spiritual weapon. The Christian wields it in preaching and in argument. But this weapon is the sword of the Spirit in another sense also. That is, it is the



Holy Spirit who determines the effect that the word of God has on people. The Christian wields it in speech and in writing, but the Spirit causes it to penetrate into the hearts of men. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would convict the world regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment. The Holy Spirit is the Christian's secret weapon. He should not be a secret to us, but he is a mystery to the unbelievers. He is the ghost, so to speak, that haunts them. He is the X-factor that they can never plan for, escape from, ensnare, or subjugate.

The Holy Spirit is a tower to the Christians. His influence is not limited to the moment of conflict, but he is the spirit of love, of power, and of a sound mind. He is the spirit of boldness, so that the early disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit when they prayed that God would grant them the boldness to preach his word. He is the spirit of knowledge and understanding, of insight and revelation, of assurance and exuberance in the defense of the faith. So he does not only teach me apologetics, as in words to say and techniques to use, but he makes me an apologist, an able vindicator of the faith. As it is written, he "trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle" (Psalm 144:1). "For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall" (Psalm 18:29, KJV).

But the Holy Spirit is a terror to the non-Christians. They are helpless and defenseless before his power. They cannot kill him, and they cannot argue against him, and they cannot escape him. Their minds are under his sovereign control. The Spirit can confound them in debate, and convict them of their sins. And even as they leave the scene, he goes with them, introducing doubts into their minds about their beliefs and conviction into their consciences about their sins. He can convert them to the Christian faith at any time he chooses. If the Spirit wills, I can break through the most hardened mind with the gospel just by asserting it. The unbelievers have no defense against me. They cannot prevent the conversion of anyone whom the Spirit has chosen to convert. The chosen ones are ours for the taking. No willpower, argument, education, or experience can resist the Holy Spirit's direct action in the mind. If God has chosen you for salvation, no power can stop me from claiming your very soul for the Lord Jesus.

Many Christians might find this aspect of apologetics difficult to fathom. This is probably because the Holy Spirit is not subject to our control. Rather, he does what he pleases, and we are under his command. Nevertheless, there are principles about his activities whose nature is such that we may learn to deliberately and intelligently interact with him. For example, he is the spirit of truth who could enable believers to understand the things of God. And Jesus taught that the Father would grant the Spirit to those who ask. So we may petition God for the Holy Spirit to fill us, to make us strong and to make us wise, and to confound the enemies of the kingdom of heaven.

## **THE GREAT INVASION**

### ***From Pagan Humility to Christian Authority***

Jesus turned the other cheek, but he also turned over tables. He did not do just one of the two all of the time, but he did both, depending on what was appropriate to the situation. Likewise, we are to do both, depending on the situation. The Christian who turns the other cheek even when he should turn over tables, probably turns the other cheek not because he

is humble, but because he is a coward. And the one who turns over tables all the time, and who never turns the other cheek, probably turns over tables not because of spiritual boldness or zealousness, but only because he has an aggressive and impatient personality. Or, perhaps both have been misinformed as to how a believer should act. We are to be able to do both, and an understanding of biblical principles will guide us as to what we are to do in any situation. In apologetics, there are times when we need to turn over some tables.

Sometimes non-Christians use 1 Peter 3:15 to manipulate believers. They exploit the Christian's own false interpretation of the verse to make him answer for his faith, and to do it with gentleness and respect. This answer is usually taken in the defensive sense, so that the Christian is supposed to endlessly provide defensive responses to questions and objections. Given the false interpretation of the verse, there is never a point when the interrogation must conclude, and when the non-Christian must either answer for his own beliefs, or else surrender to the gospel.

The gentleness and respect are understood in a way that makes them resemble the passivity in Buddhism and Confucianism rather than the fruit of the Spirit. This is an abomination, and it allows unbelievers to pressure Christians to offer only defensive answers about their faith that pose no direct intellectual threat to the unbelievers, and that pose no direct emotional strain on their feelings. So they say, "Answer me, Christian! Defend your faith to me! Explain it to me! Prove it to me! Dance! Dance! Dance! And don't you dare raise your voice, or to insult and deride me. Be nice, like the Bible tells you! And when you are done, do it all over again!"

The implications of unbiblical apologetics encourage the unbelievers to keep the intellectual and emotional burden of the conflict on the Christians all the time. The unbelievers are able to get away with this as long as the Christians operate under a false interpretation of Scripture and unnecessarily permit the unbelievers to make them suffer, all the time thinking that they are enduring defeat and humiliation for the sake of Christ. The truth is that they suffer because of a silly hermeneutical blunder. Once the interpretation is set right, the Christians are set free.

In fact, for those who affirm this false interpretation, or who maintain a general misunderstanding of what Scripture requires in terms of the answer that we give and the manner in which we give it, they will make themselves suffer without much effort from the unbelievers. They will offer defensive answers, and refrain from attacking the unbelievers. And all the time they will be doing this with exemplary Buddhist humility and Confucian gentleness. I denounce this pagan rendition of biblical ethics.

But how the truth sets us free! First, Peter is talking about the way Christians ought to behave under official interrogation, so that the gentleness and respect are shown to authorities for the sake of God, who established all authorities. Second, an "answer" refers to *anything* that might explain why we affirm the gospel or why we are justified in affirming the gospel. This must include our belief that unbelievers are foolish and wicked, that they are mentally bankrupt and morally depraved, and that all their beliefs are false and irrational. Once we possess this understanding, then we will drop that obnoxious,

effeminate, and anti-biblical "humble" apologetics. We will take up the sword of the Spirit and slaughter the non-Christians, totally subduing and humiliating them in argumentation. This shall be our answer.

When this becomes our answer, the unbelievers will realize that they are no longer safe. They can no longer manipulate us with our own Scriptures or use 1 Peter 3:15 as a shield for their unbelief and rebellion. If they attack the Christian faith, they are not going to walk away from the conflict unscathed. They will have their own ideas thoroughly examined, challenged, refuted, and destroyed – every time. Every question that they ask us will cost them. Every objection that they launch against us will backfire. And when they become weary of debate, they can no longer excuse themselves from the situation, as if they have no obligation to answer us, to answer our challenges against what they believe and how they behave. They will know that not only will we fight back when they attack, but we are going after them. We are the hunters, they are the prey.

You say, "This apologetic frightens me." You are a fool. Do you not see that this is the Great Commission? Do you not see that the Commission is a manifest for spiritual world invasion? Jesus Christ is Lord over all, and he sends us to every part of the earth, even to every person, to declare his lordship to them, and to teach them to obey everything that he has commanded. Therefore, we have the duty and the right to invade all areas of the earth, to intrude into all lives, and then to challenge and command them to repent, and to tell them what to believe and how to behave. This is the commission and the authority of the Christian.

You must accept and follow your Lord's command, and the power of his Spirit will be with you. When I answer the unbelievers, I do not answer by my own authority – I am not defending myself or asking them to worship me. But I answer in the name of the Lord Jesus, and so I answer according to his teachings, and according to what he has wrought in my life. In his name I order the unbelievers to repent and believe the gospel, and to obey everything he commands. I am a messenger of life and glory to those chosen for salvation, and a messenger of death and damnation to those who refuse to believe. We are called to world conquest, to confront the unbelievers, to attack their way of life, and to convert them to our way of thinking and living. Nothing less than this can count as Christian ministry. If we will think this way, we will advance, we will conquer, and nothing will be able to stand before us. And we will be always ready, ready to win.

### **30. The Preacher Speaks Philosophy**

The Preacher addresses a crowd, and says, "Jesus the Logos, the Word, is the light of the mind. Whoever follows him will never walk in epistemic darkness, but he will have the light of truth."

Some evidentialists challenge him, "You make the Word its own witness. Your philosophy is circular."

The Preacher answers, "Even if the Word authenticates itself, the testimony is valid, because it contains all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. You do not recognize the Word for what it is, because you judge by human standards. If the Word judges, its judgment is correct, because it testifies for itself, and God testifies for it. God can testify by no one greater than himself, for there is no one greater."

Then they ask him, "If we do not judge by human standards, how will we recognize this God?"

"You do not know the Word or God," the Preacher replies. "If you knew the Word, you would know God also."

Once more the Preacher says to them, "The Word produces a system of knowledge, and you will try to understand or reproduce it, but your philosophy will perish in epistemological impossibilities and logical self-contradictions. What the Word produces, you cannot share or duplicate."

This makes the evidentialists ask, "Will he just make things up or make deductions without using methods of discovery based on human autonomy and human ability, such as sensation and intuition? Why does he say, what the Word produces, you cannot share or duplicate?"

But he continues, "Your philosophy is from below; the Word is from above. Your philosophy is of this world; the Word is not of this world. I told you that your philosophy would die in impossibilities and self-contradictions. If you do not believe what the Word says about itself, your thinking will end in ignorance and skepticism, unable to know anything at all."

"What is this Word? How do you know what the Word is?" they ask.

"Just what I have been telling you all along," the Preacher replies. "I have much to say in judgment of your philosophy. But the Word is reliable, and what I have learned from it, I tell the world."

They do not understand that he is telling them about the Bible, or the intellectual content of the Bible, the revelation of God. So the Preacher says, "When you trace a worldview to its ultimate principles, then you will know the necessity and exclusivity of biblical revelation, and that it is what it claims to be, and that it contains nothing other than what God has revealed. The one who inspired it stands behind it, because it is the exact expression of his mind."

At this, some claim to presuppose the Bible.

To these presuppositionalists, the Preacher says, "If you hold to the Word as your first principle, then you are really its disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

They answer him, "Our philosophy presupposes the Ontological Trinity and takes belief in God as properly basic. We have never been slaves to another principle. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

The Preacher replies, "I tell you the truth, everyone who places another principle before his knowledge of revelation is a slave to that principle. A philosophy that is enslaved to this foreign principle cannot have a place under the philosophy of the Word. Your philosophy will also die in impossibilities and contradictions. But if the Word sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know you claim to presuppose the Word. Yet you are ready to renounce me, because you have no room for what I say to you. I am speaking to you from my principle, and you behave according to your first principle."

"Scripture is our first principle," they answer.

"If Scripture is your first principle," says the Preacher, "then you would begin from Scripture. As it is, you are determined to renounce me, a man who has told you the truth that I learned from biblical revelation. Scripture does not teach you to do this. You are doing the things that your first principle demands."

"We are not irrational and irreverent philosophers," they protest. "The only first principle we have is God himself."

The Preacher says to them, "If God were your first principle, you would agree with me, for my system puts his Word first place. I have not made up my philosophy, but he revealed it. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your first principle, the reliability of human discovery (whether by sensation or intuition), and you carry out whatever this principle demands. It is an epistemic failure from the beginning, unable to contact truth or reality, or contact the revelation that you claim to presuppose, because knowledge from sensation or intuition is impossible. When it produces falsehoods, it does what is natural, for it is false and is the father of fallacies. Yet because I tell you the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you refute me, or defend your human method of discovery? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? He who has revelation as the first principle submits to it and excludes all others. The reason

you do not submit to it and exclude all others is that you do not have revelation as your first principle."

The presuppositionalists answer him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are insane and arrogant?"

"I am not insane and arrogant," says the Preacher, "but I honor the Word and you dishonor me. I am not seeking vindication for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. I tell you the truth, if anyone rejects sensation, intuition, and other human-centered methods of discovery, but will truly hold to the Word alone as his first principle, he will become invincible."

At this the presuppositionalists exclaim, "Now we know that you are arrogant! The apologists and philosophers that we follow did not claim to be invincible, but you say that if anyone follows your system, he will never be defeated. Are you greater than these apologists? Who do you think you are?"

The Preacher replies, "If I claim to be invincible in myself, my claim means nothing. Scripture, which you claim to be your first principle, is what teaches this approach. Though you do not know Scripture, I know it. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know it and keep it. The apologists whom you idolize rejoiced at the thought of a scriptural philosophy. Now they see it and approve."

"You are not yet fifty years old," the presuppositionalists say to him, "and you know what they thought!"

"I tell you the truth," the Preacher answers, "they laid the foundation for this!" At this, they gnash their teeth and clench their fists, and rally together to destroy him. But the Preacher goes on his way, and continues with the work that God has foreordained for him.