

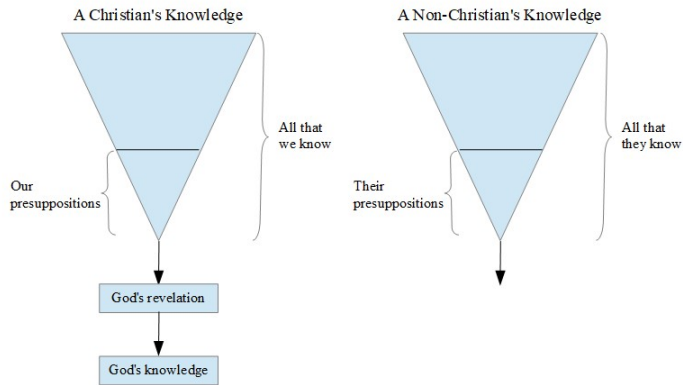
Foundations of Apologetics (part 2 of 2)

I. A Christian approach to truth and knowledge

- Before we can discuss how to defend the truth, we need to talk about how knowledge works.
- God's knowledge is fundamentally different from ours:
 - God himself is self-sufficient and independent of his creation (John 5:26; Acts 17:24-25); we exist in dependence on God (Acts 17:28; Heb 1:3).
 - Because we believe in two levels of existence, we also believe in two levels of knowledge (God's and man's).

God's knowledge	Our knowledge
Not learned or acquired	Derived from outside of us
It actually constructs the world; it is the <i>original</i>	Reconstructed from God's original interpretation of the world; it is the <i>copy</i> .
Comprehensive	Partial

- For God's and our knowledge, the reference point is the same (God's knowledge is the measure), but the content is always different. We can never know something the way God knows something.
- Our creaturely dependence on God for knowing everything leads to two models for knowledge among people: 1) a model for those who acknowledge their dependence on the triune God of the Bible (the Christian) and 2) a model for those who refuse to acknowledge him (the non-Christian):



Explanation of the diagram

- Presuppositions: the things that must be the case for the person's worldview to hold up. Presuppositions are the basis for interpreting any experience and guiding all reasoning; they make experience intelligible; they are the grid by which we see everything. Example presuppositions (some good, some bad):

- Everything happens for naturalistic reasons.
- The goal of life is to be happy.
- God made all things and everything exists for his pleasure.
- Everything we know is based on our presuppositions.
- However, the non-Christian's presuppositions are not grounded in anything; if you keep asking them, "why do you believe that?" eventually you will get to: "just cuz"; "because it makes sense to me."
- The Christian's presuppositions are ultimately grounded in the revelation of God, both in creation and in the Bible.
- And the revelation of God is itself based in God's own knowledge, which is the basis of all truth.
 - This is why Christianity allows for mysteries (e.g., the Trinity, God's relationship with the world, etc.), yet does not have incoherence at its core. Instead, we trust that everything makes sense to God, who reveals to us part of the whole.
- Unbelievers might hold things to be true that we also hold to be true, and on the surface it seems that we agree. E.g., $2 + 2 = 4$. But our conception of that fact widely differs. For example:
 - How do we know this fact? Christians: this fact is based on God's reliability as a coherent, faithful God. Unbelievers: either because it has been proven from long experience (empiricism) or because they have reasoned to it from more basic facts (rationalism).
 - What is the purpose of this knowledge? Christians: math exists for God's glory, as a tool for honoring him in his world. Unbelievers: we can use it for whatever we want.
 - In short, Van Til famously said, "Unbelievers can count, but they cannot account for counting."
- Religiously neutral "knowledge" is impossible. Either you're relying on God for what you know, or you're not. If you think you can approach knowledge without bias and without reference to God, you are biased against God, who says all truth belongs to him.

Example: creation vs. evolution

- A. The non-Christian who believes in evolution.
- Why do you believe evolution? "Because science has proven it."
 - Why do you believe science has proven it? "Because science has used abundant evidence and has reasoned carefully from that evidence. Also, it explains how life could have arisen without outside (i.e., divine) intervention."
 - Why do you believe that abundant evidence and careful reasoning establishes things? "How else would you arrive at truth? It's just how we know things. The whole scientific community of experts couldn't possibly be wrong. Experts are trustworthy, unbiased interpreters when they use the scientific method."
 - Now we have arrived at presuppositions, but they have no foundation.
 - These presuppositions color everything: for the unbeliever, apples are Creator-denying apples (they come from evolutionary processes); the non-existence of God is part of the (implicit)

definition of apples (cf. Thom Notaro, *Van Til and the Use of Evidence*).

B. The Christian who believes in creation.

- Why do you believe creation? “First, because the creation itself manifests tremendous wisdom, design, and beauty, such that only a highly intelligent creator could have made all of this. Second, the Bible declares it to be so.”
- Why do you believe the creation witnesses to a creator? “God actively reveals himself through all he has made; he is an effective communicator (cf. Rom 1:19–20).” Why do you believe the Bible is trustworthy? “Because it is the Word of God, which proves itself to be true.”
 - Now we have also arrived at presuppositions, but they are grounded in God’s revelation of himself.

II. A Christian approach to apologetics

- Goals:
 1. Take the argument down to the core of people’s belief systems—to their *presuppositions*.
 2. Expose:
 - Their *self-deception*: that their presuppositions are based on nothing; they simply *want* to believe them.
 - Their *incoherence*: that their system contradicts itself.
 - Their *sin*: that their beliefs really come down to their attempt to understand the world apart from the God of the Bible, so they do not need to be accountable to him. (Preserving their autonomy.)
 3. Show:
 - That Christianity is coherent with itself.
 - That all our presuppositions are based on God and his revelation.
 - That the gospel provides a way for rebels to find salvation and genuine truth.
- Basic process:
 1. Understand what someone is saying by listening well.
 - Keep asking: “Why do you believe that?”
 - Rearticulate what you are hearing until you get to the point where they say, “Right, you understand me.”
 2. Show the incoherence of their system.
 - Example 1. “You claim that no one should be able to impose their ethics on others. But you have plenty of things that you think never should be allowable.”
 - Example 2. “You claim to be basing everything you believe on reason. Yet your presuppositions have no ground in reason, and are based simply on what you want to believe.”
 3. Bring them to our ground and call them to repent. Show how the things that make their system fail do not cause Christianity to crumble. Defend everything from Scripture.
 - For example 1: “No human being has any intrinsic authority to impose their will on others. But God, who made us, has the right to tell us how to live. And he has not been silent; that’s why he

gave us consciences (Rom 2:15) and his word, the Bible (2 Tim 3:16).”

- For example 2: “You’re banking everything on your ability to reason well about the world. But no one is adequate to understand this world except the God who made it and understands it entirely. We’re all twisted, partial knowers (Rom 1:22–23). We need to rely not on ourselves but on God (Ps 36:9).”
- Show them the glory of the gospel: “Even our attempt to understand the world apart from God is rebellion. But God sent his son to save rebels like us (John 3:16).”
- Things we must not do:
 1. Do not attempt to prove the Bible from something outside of the Bible.
 - God does not to bow down to some external standards of logic or history, as though he were a creature! He *defines* logic and history!
 - Bahnsen: “God alone is adequate to bear witness to Himself or to authorize His own words.”
 2. Do not pretend that we can produce evidence “that demands a verdict” as though any objective observer would accept it.
 - There are no “brute facts.” Bahnsen: “There is no pristine, religiously neutral, abstract ‘reason’ to which all men first swear their allegiance, only then to turn to such secondary matters as man’s nature, moral character, [the existence of God,] etc.”
 - Bahnsen: Reason is not an abstract, unbiased tool: it is always tied to either belief or unbelief; reason cannot simultaneously be subordinate to God and stand in judgment over God!
 - All our world is interpreted through our presuppositions, which is why we need to get to that level.

Example: the resurrection of Christ

The non-Christian denies the resurrection of Christ.

1. Listening down to presuppositions
 - Why do you not believe Christ’s resurrection? “Because religious people made this up.”
 - Why do you believe religious people made this up? “Because resurrections, if they happen at all, are extremely unusual things that would require better proof than simply a few self-interested people telling us that it happened.”
 - What would count as sufficient proof for you? “Some kind of archaeological evidence, or some unbiased (i.e., non-Christian) observers testifying under oath that it happened.”
 - Why would that be sufficient? “Because the science of archaeology is objective and unbiased observers count as reliable witnesses.”
2. Showing incoherence
 - But everyone is actually an interested party. If the resurrection is true, it means we need to follow Jesus. If it is not, then we don’t need to follow him. You yourself have a lot at stake in whether Jesus actually rose from the dead and is seated as king at God’s right hand. If this is true, then you are not in obedience to the king of all things. Your “unbiased” decision about what would count as sufficient evidence is actually biased against God.

3. Calling to repentance

- Despite our rebellion and rejection of God's witness to himself, God sent his son to die for our sin and be raised for us.
- We can know this is true because of the witness of God himself through his apostles, in passages like Matthew 28 or Luke 24. God gets to determine what counts as his own best witnesses, and he raised up these eyewitnesses, who spoke on his behalf (1 Thess 2:13). Moreover, his Holy Spirit testifies to us that these words are true (1 Cor 2:12-14).
- Would you be willing to ask God to help you see the truth of these words as we read them together?