



ALL SAINTS

REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Defending the Faith: Presuppositional
Apologetics for the Person in the Pew
Week 1

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Overview

- Apologetics is the art of defending the faith.
- It is often associated with evangelism.
- We are going to talk briefly about why we should study apologetics, the types of apologetics, and then look in more detail at one apologetic method in particular.

Defined

- Cornelius Van Til: “Apologetics is the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life.” Quoted in Greg Bahnsen, Van Til’s Apologetic 34.

Philosophy?

- Is Christianity a philosophy of life? What is a philosophy?
- **Philosophy:** “the most basic beliefs, concepts, and attitudes of an individual or group.” Merriam-Webster dictionary.
- Christianity is not a bolt-on accessory to your life. If you really believe the Bible is true, then it must necessarily govern all aspect of how you think, act, and live your life. We will be exploring this idea in our class together.
- We can also call the Christianity philosophy of life, the Christian **Worldview**.

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Why do Apologetics?

- 1) So that we might remove impediments to faith held by others.
- 2) So that we can be strengthened in our own faith and strengthen the faith of other believers.
- 3) The Bible tells us to.

Biblical Basis

“13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 **but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,** 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.” 1 Peter 3:15

Biblical Basis

The word translated here as “make a defense” is the Greek word ἀπολογία (apologia) (Strong’s G627). It appears 8 times in the NT, and it always has the same sense of make a defense or giving an answer. (See Acts 22:1, Acts 25:16, 1 Co 9:3, 2 Co. 7:11, Phil. 1:7, Phil 1:17, 2 Tim 4:16)

Biblical Basis

“3 Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. 4 For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”
Jude 3

Biblical Basis

“3 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 **We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,** 6 being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.” 2 Co. 10:5

Caution

- When we do apologetics, we are trying to persuade people and vindicate the honor of Christ.
- We don't accomplish either by being rude, mean, or arrogant.
- We must speak the truth in love.
- We are destroying arguments, not people.

It has Limits

We can't talk someone into believing in Christ. Faith must come from God. We are commanded to do evangelism, however.

WCF 10:1

1. All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, *taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh*; renewing their wills, and, by his almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.

WCF 10:1.

Ezekiel 36:22-27

“24 I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. 25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. **And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.** 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” Ezekiel 36:22-27.

Evidentiary Apologetics

- Evidentiary Apologetics is associated with people like Josh McDowell.
- It is based on the idea that you can persuade people to believe by proving through external evidence that the scriptures are true.



Evidentiary Apologetics

“How high do you think the stack of New Testament manuscripts would be? Think about this: of just the 5,800+ Greek New Testament manuscripts, there are more than 2.6 million pages. Combining both the Old and the New Testament, there are more than 66,000 manuscript and scrolls.” McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Life-changing Truth for a Skeptical World, revised 2017.

Presuppositional Apologetics

Presuppositional apologetics seeks to defend the faith by exposing the presuppositions of the unbeliever, contrasting them with those of the Christian, and demonstrating the irrationality and absurdity of the unbeliever's position.



Presuppositional Apologetics

- Presupposition Apologetics is a method of apologetics that defends the Christian faith by establishing the impossibility of the contrary.
- Instead of starting from a neutral position (which as we will see is not neutral at all), we assume God is true.
- We then expose the inconsistency of the unbeliever's worldview.
- **We go on offense.**

Presuppositional Defined

- Presupposition: “an elementary assumption in one’s reasoning or in the process by which opinions are formed....a personal commitment that is held at the most basic level of one’s network of beliefs.”
- Bahnsen, Greg, Van Til’s Apologetic, p. 2 n. 4.

Presuppositional Defined

- “Presuppositions form a wide-ranging, foundational perspective (or starting point) in terms of which everything else is interpreted and evaluated.
- As such, presuppositions have the greatest authority in one’s thinking, being treated as one’s least negotiable beliefs and being granted the highest immunity to revision.”
Bahnsen, Greg, Van Til’s Apologetic, p. 2 n. 4.

Presuppositional Defined

“People have presuppositions, and they will live more consistently on the basis of these presuppositions than even they themselves may realize. By presuppositions we mean the basic way an individual looks at life, his basic world view, the grid through which he sees the world.

Presuppositional Defined

Presuppositions rest upon that which a person considers to be the truth of what exists. People's presuppositions lay a grid for all they bring forth into the external world. Their presuppositions also provide the basis for their values and therefore the basis for their decisions." Francis Shaeffer, How Should We Then Live?, p. 19.

Presuppositional Defined

In other words, a presupposition is a basic assumption that you live your life by and use to interpret everything else.

Presuppositional Apologetics

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Examples:

- The reliability of memory
- Reliance on your senses and reasoning
- Continuity of the physical world.

Presuppositional Apologetics

- So what is this all about?
- When talking to someone about the existence of God or the truth of the scriptures, we can't talk our friend into believing.
- What we can do is expose the flaws in their worldview.
- God has to change their heart for them to believe.

Presuppositional Apologetics

"It is never about winning, Greg. Its about exposing their inconsistency. God does everything else. Never forget the antithesis."

Cornelius Van Til to Greg Bahnsen (1985),
quoted in Pushing the Antithesis: The Apologetic
Methodology of Greg Bhansen, Gary Demar, ed.
(2007).

Why Presuppositional Apologetics?

Most of the people we encounter in 21st century Virginia who aren't Christians are **secular materialists**. They deny the supernatural entirely or at least deny its relevance to their lives.

Why Presuppositional Apologetics?

- A better word than supernatural is **transcendental**.
- *Transcendental*: that which is true but which we cannot prove by science.

Presuppositional Apologetics

- Secular people assume that they can rely on their senses and their reason and that the physical world will continue to work the same way.
- But there is no basis for this apart from God.

Presuppositional Apologetics

“The ‘natural man’ assumes that there is a ‘principle of rationality,’ including the laws of logic, i.e. the law of identity, the law of excluded middle and the law of contradiction which is, like the ‘facts,’ just there. The facts he speaks of he assumes to be non-created facts. There is no ‘curse’ that rests upon nature because of man’s sin. The ‘natural man’ assumes that he himself, being ‘just there,’ can relate the space-time facts which are ‘just there’ by means of a ‘principle of rationality’ that is ‘just there’ to one another or that if he cannot do this, no one can. It does not occur to him to think of God as the one whose thoughts are higher than his thoughts. How do I, as a Christian, know all this information about the “natural man.”

Presuppositional Apologetics

Christ tells me this in Scripture. Moreover, the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit gives me life from the dead so that I understand this not merely in intellectual fashion but existentially, I have been born again unto knowledge. Once I am born again I know that I am a creature made in the image of God. I now know that together with all men I became a sinner, a covenant-breaker, subject to the wrath of God. I now know that Christ died to redeem me from the curse that rested upon me for my disobedience of the law of God and that in him I am now justified. I know that I am, together with the body of the redeemed, on the way to my Savior's presence.

Presuppositional Apologetics

In the words of the Heidelberg Catechism I am now persuaded that “I belong, not to myself, but to my faithful Savior and that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair shall fall from my head.” Cornelius Van Til, Letter to Francis Schaeffer, March 11, 1969, available at <https://www.opc.org/OS/html/V6/4d.html>.

Presuppositional Apologetics

- Presuppositional apologetics is really effective when talking to people who think this way.
- It is less effective in talking to Muslims, Hindus, or others who hold to a non-Christian belief system that embraces an erroneous view of the transcendental.

All Knowledge is From God

- The basis of the Christian worldview is that the Bible is true and we can rely on it.
- From that, we can trust our senses and our reason.
- We also have answers to the origin of the Universe and what happens after death.

All Knowledge is From God

- The Bible is the Word of God—believe it and stick to it.
- The knowledge of God is beginning of wisdom.
- Proverbs 1:7: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”
- Psalm 14:1: “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good.”

How do you know God exists?

- **Because my Bible tells me so.**
- Someone might say that this is circular.
- It is.
- Without God you can't know anything.

Van Til

“I feel that the whole of history and civilization would be unintelligible to me if it were not for my belief in God. So true is this, that I propose to argue that unless God is back of everything, you cannot find meaning in anything. I cannot even argue for belief in Him, without already having taken Him for granted.”

Van Til

“And similarly I contend that you cannot argue against belief in Him unless you also first take Him for granted. Arguing about God's existence, I hold, is like arguing about air. You may affirm that air exists, and I that it does not. But as we debate the point, we are both breathing air all the time.” Cornelius Van Til, *Why I Believe in God* (available at <http://reformed.org/apologetics/>).

Think Like a Christian

- In order to effectively defend the faith and answer the skeptic, we must learn to think like a Christian.
- We must not let our thinking be given over to secularism with Christianity as a disconnected epilogue at the end.

Think Like a Christian

- “4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,” 2 Co. 10:4-5.
- Weapons not of the flesh. We don’t use force or violence to vindicate Christ.
- We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.
- Note the antithesis. Opinions raised against the knowledge of God.
- Learn first to think as a Christian. Every thought captive.

Think Like a Christian

- “The Christian does not have any area of his or her life that is surrendered to neutrality.” Greg Bahnsen
- No area of reasoning that is not related somehow to the prerogatives and claims of Jesus.
- Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind. This is an expression of our love for God.
- Christians often don't see how disobedient they are in the way that they think. They are intellectually lazy. Intellectually disloyal to Christ. Without knowing it in many cases.

Think Like a Christian

We will explore this more fully later, but for now remember that if the Bible is true, and the claims of Christianity are true, then they are necessarily the central truths of life from which everything else flows. The Bible is the standard of truth against which everything else must be judged

The Myth of Neutrality

- The person who is denying God isn't really neutral.
- They know in their heart there is a God, and they are in rebellion against him.
- Rather than being neutral, they are enemies of God.
- Philosophy that is founded on human principles is a lie from hell. Philosophy must be founded on the Word and on Christ to have any real claim to truth.

The Myth of Neutrality

- They're not neutral, and you shouldn't be either.
- If we start a conversation about the existence of God or the truth of the Bible with the assumption that it's not true, we have already lost.
- **Don't concede the opponent's presuppositions.**

The Myth of Neutrality

- To start the conversation by assuming “not god” is just as “arbitrary” as assuming “god.”
- Of course it isn’t really arbitrary at all, because the skeptic is assuming big pieces of the Christian worldview, even if he won’t admit it.

The Myth of Neutrality

- Every system of thought has its self-verifying authority.
- Every worldview must assume its ultimate authority.
- Unbelievers profess their neutrality in order to claim innocence before God. “It is God’s fault that I don’t believe, not mine—so I am not responsible.”
- This is wrong, but it also turns creation on its head, making man the judge of God.

The Myth of Neutrality

- One of the main false neutrality claims we encounter in our culture are people who claim they only believe what they can see and hear or what can be proved by science.
- This is a false claim even if the person making it doesn't realize it. Most of what people think they "know" they believe because they were told it by someone else or read it in a book or online. There is an implicit trust in those sources of information.
- Consider the position that you are willing to believe everything you read in your biology textbook but not what you read in your Bible. This is not a neutral position.

The Myth of Neutrality

“17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the **futility of their minds.** **18 They are darkened in their understanding,** alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self,[f] which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”
Ephesians 4:17-24

The Myth of Neutrality

- Beginning with the not-God assumption is also not a neutral position.
- It is an anti-Christian position which defies the very nature of reality.
- It defies the truth that is written on our hearts and on the face of creation itself.
- Do not be sucked in by false neutrality.
- Nothing is neutral.

Total War

- If you are in a debate or discussion about the truth of the Gospel, it is not a compartmentalized discussion about religion as an accessory.
- Christianity is utterly opposed to and incompatible to other world views.

Total War

“22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;” 1 Co 1:22-23.

Total War

- The world looks upon the Gospel as foolishness. Greeks seek wisdom.
- In the eyes of the worldly-wise the Gospel is foolish.
- What the world proclaims as wise, God calls foolish.
- Two different views that are systematically at war with each other.

Total War

- Different methods. Different starting points. Different conclusions.
- Remember the world is at war with God.
- Peace only comes through submission to Christ.
- There is no middle ground.

Total War

- There is an antithesis between the believer and the unbeliever.
- It dates from Genesis 3. Enmity between the seed of the woman and seed of the serpent.
- Pervasive throughout scripture.
- Will be persistent through eternity.

Total War

- In principle, believers and unbelievers have nothing in common.
- In practice, we have common ground because non-believers are inconsistent and actually borrow the Christian worldview to support their presuppositions.

Total War

“Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called ‘knowledge,’ 21 for by professing it some have swerved from the faith.”
1 Tim 6:20.

Total War

- Everyone whether believer or unbeliever, takes things for granted.
- Everyone has those things which they no longer question but which they just assume.
- Standard by which they think they can discover more truth about the world.
- Everybody has a philosophy of life that tells them what the limits of reality, standards of discovery are, and what our methods should be.
- Everybody has got a worldview. More on this next week.

