

Lesson 8

Approaching the Unbeliever

Based on Lecture 4 of

Greg L. Bahnsen's *Basic Training for Defending the Faith*

“Do not answer a fool according to his folly,

Lest you also be like him.

Answer a fool as his folly deserves,

Lest he be wise in his own eyes.”

(Proverbs 26:4–5)

You are finally ready to learn specifically *how* to engage apologetics with the unbeliever. All of the groundwork Dr. Bahnsen has laid to this point should now make more philosophical sense for understanding your Christian worldview. It should also begin making *practical* sense for presenting your apologetic challenge to the non-Christian.

In our last lesson we noted that as a Christian you are standing against the cold winds of impersonalism which blow over our cultural landscape today. Because of the great success of modern scientific and technological achievement, Western civilization has tended to discount metaphysical questions. Instead, our mind-set is more toward the sense-oriented, empirical scientific method. You must recognize this default bias of modern man because you need to respond to it.

You have been learning a lot about worldviews. You are now seeing that to justify logical reasoning and to validate human experience, you will have to operate self-consciously in terms of a complete worldview—including not only epistemology (how we know), but metaphysics (what is the nature of reality) and ethics (how we should behave). Despite modern naivete, you cannot have an

epistemology without a metaphysic, for your theory of knowing must be compatible with your theory of reality. This will be the unbeliever's downfall, as we will see.

In this lesson we are ready to outline the general procedure for defending the faith. Although the prior studies may have raised the uneasy concern that apologetics is too philosophical and sophisticated, you will learn that it is actually quite simple. And apologetics is especially simple when employing the presuppositional method because you are not required to learn every fact of human experience "just in case."

Nor may the unbeliever skirt the issue by declaring, "We are working on it." The presuppositional method deals with issues that must exist *prior* to the facts, for the facts to be known and used. Therefore, you will have the apologetic tools to answer all forms of objections from all types of people at all times. Dr. Van Til expresses this remarkable nature of apologetic method:

When we approach the question in this way we should be willing to start anywhere and with any fact that any person we meet is interested in. The very conviction that there is not a single fact that can really be known unless it is interpreted theistically [i.e., with reference to God] gives us this liberty to start anywhere, as far as a proximate starting point is concerned. . . . We can start with any fact at all and challenge "our friends the enemy," to give us an intelligible interpretation of it.¹

All facts speak of God's existence, for Acts 14:17 declares that God "did not leave Himself without a witness."

¹Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 205.

Should you not expect this since Peter commands you to “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, *always being ready* to make a defense to *everyone* who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15)? Dr. Bahnsen explains this more fully:

Despite the variety of criticism and the many modes in which they are expressed, there is a common, basic, set of circumstances and principles that are embodied in each and every apologetic encounter. . . . Due to God’s inescapable revelation every unbeliever nevertheless knows God and thereby (contrary to his espoused principles) knows himself and the world in some measure; knowing God, all men are then without an apologetic for their rebellion against His truth. The whole created realm constantly reveals the living and true God, thus providing abundant common ground between the believer and unbeliever. Since the latter is always the image of God, and since he possesses the truth of God although suppressed), the apologist always has a point of contact with him. . . . The very possibility of knowledge outside of God’s revelation (savingly presented in Christ) must be undermined.²

In the last lesson you learned that generally unbelievers attempt to avoid metaphysical considerations. You also learned that his system cannot justify his foundational assumptions for logical reasoning and human experience. You saw that by the very nature of the situation, worldview presuppositions *must be verified by some ultimate authority*, if they are to carry any weight and be anything more than subjective assertions. Unfortunately for the unbeliever, he has no self-verifying authority. This is where the presuppositional method renders the unbelieving worldview subjective and irrational.

But now the question arises: How can I get through to the unbeliever in such a situation? If worldviews are self-contained and self-attesting, how can I reason with the unbeliever in his own self-

²Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 104, 105.

contained worldview? Are the unbeliever and I at an impasse where we can only call each other “heretic” and then go home?

Rudyard Kipling once wrote of the worldview problems distinguishing the Islamic world from the Christian world: “Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet” (*The Ballad of East and West*, 1889). Does this sort of problem characterize the confrontation between belief and unbelief? Was the famed Reformed apologist, theologian, and statesman, Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), correct when he stated of the worldview conflict with the unbeliever: “It will be impossible to settle the difference of insight. No polemic between these two kinds of science . . . can ever serve any purpose. This is the reason why apologetics has always failed to reach results.”³

No, we are not left in an irresolvable deadlock. Presuppositional Apologetics is, as Dr. Bahnsen has called it, “nuclear strength apologetics.”⁴ And when nuclear weapons go off, you don’t just walk away muttering and complaining. The unbeliever’s world is catastrophically impacted, to say the least.

I. Exegetical Observations

We will break with our normal order of approach by *beginning* with “Exegetical Observations,” since this portion of Dr. Bahnsen’s lecture specifically presents the biblical foundation for his apologetic procedure. Then we will return to his “Central Concerns,” which elucidate and apply the biblically warranted method.

In Proverbs 26:4–5 we discover what becomes an effective procedural outline for biblical apologetics. Upon your first reading of this passage it might appear contradictory, thereby confusing you. But once you analyze it carefully you will discern a beautiful procedural method. Although we know

³Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. Hendrik De Vries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968 [1898]), 160.

⁴A helpful academic study in apologetics is Dr. Bahnsen’s ten-lecture “Transcendental Arguments: Nuclear Strength Apologetics.” It is available from Covenant Media Foundation (Set # ASV7).

Solomon was not teaching a course in apologetics, it nevertheless is true that he lays down wise principles by means of proverbial maxim, many of which are useful in apologetics.⁵

Solomon's directive reads as follows: "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes" (Prov. 26:4–5 NIV).⁶ What in the world is he saying? And how is it helpful for apologetics?

Recognizing the fool

Before we get start unpacking his specific meaning here, we must first understand what he means by "fool." In that we are dealing with worldviews as systems, we should expect that we must look to Scripture (the epistemological foundation to our worldview) to determine the true nature of the fool. In the Bible a fool is not necessarily one who is a mentally deficient, shallow-minded ignoramus. He is not one whom we might pejoratively call an "idiot."⁷ In fact, oftentimes he is bright and respectable before the eyes of the world (Rom. 1:22; 1 Cor. 1:20, 26, 27; 3:18–19).

For apologetic purposes a fool is one who does what "is right in his own eyes" (Prov. 12:15; Judges 17:6)—much like Adam and Eve when they evaluated God's command and dismissed it on their own authority. Thus, the fool is one who "trusts in his heart" (Prov. 28:26; cp. Jer. 9:23), whereas the wise man hears a different call: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5; cp. 22:19; Ps. 37:5).

⁵Dr. Bahnsen frequently lamented that the Christian apologist did not use Proverbs more often. As we mentioned in an earlier lesson, Ecclesiastes powerfully confronts the worldview of unbelief by demonstrating the glorious superiority of God's perspective on life over against a view of life approached only "under heaven" or "under the sun." A helpful commentary to this end is H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966).

⁶Here we depart from our use of the New American Standard, in that it is somewhat deficient. The New International Version translates the matter well, as do the King James Version, New King James Version, and the New Revised Standard Version translations

⁷Nevertheless, the word "idiot" derives from the Greek *idiotes* which itself is based on *idios*. This is most appropriate for our understanding of the biblical notion of a fool, for *idios* means "one's own, private." Etymologically then, we may say the fool does things like an "idiot": he does them his own way without reference to a law outside of himself.

Ultimately considered, a fool is one who rejects God, the ultimate source of wisdom and truth: “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Ps. 14:1; 53:1). He is a fool because “the fear of the Lord is the *beginning*” of “knowledge” (Prov. 1:7; 2:4–6) and of “wisdom” (Prov. 9:10; cp. Job 28:28; Psa. 111:10; Prov. 15:33). Rather than building his life on the sure, rock-bottom foundation of God and his word, the fool builds his house upon shifting sand (Matt. 7:26) for he “does not know the way of the Lord” (Jer. 5:4; cp. Eph. 5:17).

In rejecting God, the unbeliever necessarily becomes “futile in his speculations” (Rom. 1:21) so that he ends up worshiping and serving the creation rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:22–23, 25). Evolutionary scientific theory sees the Universe as its own creator and, therefore, the source of all else. With this self-sustaining, creative power, the Universe effectively becomes god.

World-renowned physicist Stephen Hawking writes that in his cosmological model “there would be no singularities at which the laws of science broke down and no edge of space-time at which one would have to appeal to God or some new law to set the boundary conditions for space-time . . . The universe would be completely self-contained and not affected by anything outside itself. It would neither be created nor destroyed. It would just BE. . . . What place, then, for a creator?”⁸

Presuppositional Apologetics shows the foolishness of unbelief. As you now realize, unbelievers actively suppress the truth of God though they know him deep down in their heart-of-hearts (Rom. 1:18–20). And as you are beginning to see, they have to live against reality, denying God who alone provides the pre-conditions of intelligibility necessary for human reason and experience. The remaining lessons will bring this problem into bold relief. The unbeliever is very literally “without an apologetic,” according to Paul in Romans 1:20. In the Greek the phrase “they are without excuse” is: *einai autous anapologetous*. You can see our English word “apologetics” in the Greek *anapologetous*, which derives from *a* (“no”) and *apologeomai* (“defend”).

⁸S. W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam, 1988), 136, 141.

Now then, what does Solomon mean in Proverbs 26? Why does he direct us on the one hand *not* to “answer a fool according to his folly” (v. 4), while on the other, he urges us to “answer a fool according to his folly” (v. 5)? This seems contradictory. But it is not; and it precisely outlines the Presuppositional Apologetic’s two-step procedure: Positively, you must present the truth and, negatively, you must warn of folly. Be aware: though biblical apologetics involves these two steps, you do *not* have to use them *in this order*. The apologetic situation might require that the order be reversed. Nevertheless, *both* steps are necessary, even if not in any particular order.

Presenting the truth

In Proverbs 26:4 Solomon directs the wise man *not* to answer a fool according to his folly. He is warning you against reasoning with a fool *on his own terms*. Applying this to the apologetics enterprise, we can say that you should not reason with the unbeliever according to the assumptions of *his* worldview. You must, that is, avoid the neutrality principle as being a vain attempt at meeting the unbeliever on allegedly neutral territory, accepting his worldview and its procedures as valid. You must not surrender the foundational assumptions of your Christian worldview and try to build an apologetic bridge on the foundations and by the tools of unbelief.

Jesus provides a parable illustrating the difference between a wise man and a fool which substantiates Solomon’s two-step procedure. The Lord’s parable confirms the wisdom of building one’s life and position on the solid rock of God’s word, on the biblical worldview:

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock” (Matt. 7:24–25).

You must build your apologetic upon God's revelation. The unbeliever must see the beauty, integrity, coherence, and necessity of God's word as the only foundation for interpreting reality and establishing knowledge.

As a Christian you should love God's word; as a rational creature you should recognize the necessity of God's word; as an apologist you should admit to the unbeliever your commitment to God's word. You don't want to hide your commitment to the Bible; you are not playing games with the unbeliever. His eternal destiny is on the line, and your faithfulness is on display. You must "be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

Remember, *worldviews are in collision*. Worldviews are complex, inter-locking systems of belief. The unbeliever's whole worldview must be challenged by the integrity of the full Christian worldview as revealed in Scripture—with its metaphysic *and* epistemology intact. You must set before him the full-orbed intellectual challenge of the holistic Christian worldview. You must not adopt portions of and procedures from *his* worldview and allow him to think his assumptions about the world are valid. For if you do, Solomon warns, "you will be like him yourself" (Prov. 26:4b).

Warning of Folly

But in Proverbs 26:5, Solomon turns around and immediately recommends that you *do* "answer a fool according to his folly"! Why would he do that? What's going on here?

Here he is instructing you to temporarily stand on the presuppositions of the unbeliever, not as a matter of neutrality and compromise, not as endorsing his worldview procedures. Rather, he does so in order for you to show the unbeliever the vanity of attempting to explain the world and life from his own perspective. You must let him know that you are taking his position *only momentarily*, just "for sake of argument."

In this step you will be showing the unbeliever that on *his* own autonomous presuppositions he cannot justify reality, knowledge, logic, morality, value, meaning, purpose—or anything. You want to show him the *outcome* of his worldview *when his principles are fully followed out*. Thus, Solomon allows that you may “answer a fool according to his folly”—*so that* the fool will see the error of his being “wise in his own eyes” (Prov. 26:5b). If you adopt the unbeliever’s procedures as your actual apologetic, he will suppose himself to have the correct position. Whereas, if you only theoretically adopt it in order to demonstrate his error, then you are being faithful to the biblical model of apologetics.

Again, Jesus’ parable of the two builders helps you see the value of the two-step apologetic embodied in Proverbs 26:4–5. In the first step wherein you are encouraged to *avoid* answering the fool according to his folly, you saw a parallel with the wise man in the parable who built upon a rock. In this second step you can temporarily adopt the error of the foolish who reject the word of God. You must show them that they end up building their lives on sinking sand:

“And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall” (Matt. 7:26–27).

II. Central Concerns

Dr. Bahnsen’s central concern in this portion of his lecture is *procedural* or methodological. He is interested in your following the *biblical pattern* for apologetics as illustrated in Proverbs 26. You must now consider *how* to employ the simple two-step method in order to *practically* engage apologetics.

As a believer you should follow a dual-track procedure: (1) Positively, you must stand firmly on your own presuppositions to present the truth claims of Christianity to the unbeliever. You must respond from within your own worldview, refusing to accept the unbeliever’s assumptions and method. (2)

Negatively, you should temporarily adopt the unbeliever's presuppositions to do an internal critique of his worldview in order to show him its futility. You must do an internal critique of his worldview showing the unbeliever where his presuppositions lead: to epistemological futility.

Having carefully analyzed worldviews and their presuppositions, you should now realize the bold nature of the Christian claim that must be made to the unbeliever. That claim is: *Christianity is the only rational worldview to hold*. You heard correctly! Your holy faith is the *only reasonably defensible position* that a person can adopt. You must have this clearly in mind when confronting the unbeliever.

To put this another way: You should not argue that Christianity is the *best* worldview. This suggests other competing philosophies of life have some rational merit and might even be almost as good. It adopts Satan's method of suggesting that men are to evaluate and choose worldviews based on their own fallen assumptions. Dr. Van Til comments in this regard: "This whole Christian theistic position must be presented not as something just a little or as a great deal better than other positions, but must be presented as the only system of thought that does not destroy human experience to a meaningless something. . . . Any other way of defense reduces the uniqueness of Christianity at once. The question is one of 'this or nothing.'"⁹

Given all that Dr. Bahnsen has presented thus far, you must understand that the Christian outlook is the *only* reasonable worldview. It is the only worldview that makes human experience understandable and whose principles do not annihilate human understanding. Dr. Bahnsen explains that on the unbeliever's own principles "autonomous man can never give an intelligible, coherent, or meaningful *account* of how he is able to know anything or accomplish anything culturally. The unbeliever's failure is a rational or philosophical failure to make sense out of knowledge, morality, beauty, etc."¹⁰

Consequently, your twin apologetic strategy boils down to this: *You are challenging the unbeliever in one form or another to answer the question as to which worldview makes human experience*

⁹Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 222.

¹⁰Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 113.

intelligible. This is crucial for biblical apologetics. You are requiring the unbeliever to think about and declare the final reference point in his system which makes all facts and laws intelligible. Dr. Van Til discusses the goal of our apologetic engagement with the unbeliever: “What we shall have to do then is to try to reduce our opponent’s position to an absurdity. Nothing less will do. Without God, man is completely lost in every respect, epistemologically as well as morally and religiously.”¹¹

Because of the worldview nature of biblical apologetics, it does not focus on particular facts. It is not a *direct* argument dealing with *individual* facts, but an *indirect* one dealing with the *nature* of facts. It does not defensively construct atomistic answers to an endless variety of criticisms. Dr. Bahnsen explains that an “indirect argument” is an argument

from the impossibility of the contrary. . . . A direct argument is possible between two people who share relevant assumptions. Within the context of that interpretive agreement, they can directly appeal to observed facts, personal values and standards, or lines of reasoning that should ‘carry weight’ with the other person; no entrenched “interpretive” disagreement would be expected. . . . However, when the argument involves disagreement over one’s ultimate assumptions (e.g., the existence of God, man’s nature and place in the cosmos, or the standards of right and wrong), there is nothing to which direct appeal can be made which is not itself weighted or interpreted in terms of the very standards or values that are being debated.¹²

This method digs down beneath the facts to their foundation, to uncover more basic and broader questions regarding their *fundamental character*. To put it another way, you do not want to trim the unbeliever’s tree, but dig it up by its roots. Dr. Bahnsen explains:

¹¹Van Til, *Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 205.

¹²Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 485.

Factual argumentation may become necessary, but it is never sufficient. What one takes to *be* factual, as well as the *interpretation* of accepted facts, will be *governed* by his underlying *philosophy of fact*—that is, by more basic, all-pervasive, value-oriented, categorizing, possibility-determining, probability-rating, supra-experiential, religiously-motivated *presuppositions*. It is at this presuppositional level that the crucial work in defending the faith must thus be done.¹³

Ultimately then, apologetics must ask whether facts are random events in a chance Universe, as per the unbeliever's worldview. Or whether they are elements of the all-organizing, rational plan of God who created, governs, and gives meaning, value, and purpose to the Universe and all of its facts. For you see, once God is denied, the only explanation possible for the original creation of the Universe is by chance. Consequently, the unbeliever's worldview is ultimately rooted in chance.

Facts in themselves can't settle anything because they need a worldview to provide their interpretation.¹⁴ But in the unbelieving worldview facts are random, chance events. They have no meaning because ultimately considered they sustain no necessary connection to any other facts, in that chance is the opposite of law (which organizes and relates facts). You should not attempt to settle issues by a direct discussion of particular facts. This could last forever (think of all the facts in the Universe!) and would never get at the undergirding philosophy of fact that flows from and reveals the mind of God.

¹³Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 71.

¹⁴Remember our earlier denial of "brute," uninterpreted, free-standing facts. All facts require interpretive context. For instance, if I mention the word "shoe," what does it mean? To understand the word "shoe," you must know the English language, understand something of the human foot, realize the human method of erect, bi-pedal locomotion, be aware of the hard character of the rock-studded surface of the earth, know something of the nature of pain, appreciate the advantage of comfort, grasp the usefulness of leather, nails, and string, and much, much more.

Dr. Bahnsen points out that “although the Christian does not know all the facts . . . , he does know the pattern . . . in which alone they make sense (are connected).”¹⁵

This is why Dr. Bahnsen takes so much time and expends so much energy in explaining worldviews as a network of beliefs established upon presuppositional foundations. So now you should begin seeing more clearly that to reason by presuppositions you must understand your *own* metaphysical and epistemological program, *and* make the unbeliever understand *his*—because this is where the battle lies.

As we are about to see, in the final analysis the presuppositional argument may be put very simply, profoundly, and boldly: *The proof of Christianity is the impossibility of the contrary.*¹⁶ That is, the validation of the Christian worldview is that without it you cannot prove anything. This phrase capsulizes the biblical proof of God. Dr. Van Til expresses it this way: “The only ‘proof’ of the Christian position is that unless its truth is presupposed there is no possibility of ‘proving’ anything at all.”¹⁷ As C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) put it: “There is a difficulty about disagreeing with God. He is the source from which all your reasoning power comes.”

In the two-step Presuppositional Apologetic, you must challenge the unbeliever to provide the *preconditions of intelligibility*, that is, the necessary conditions that must exist in order to provide for the possibility of rational thought and meaningful discourse. And you must show him that only Christianity can do so. He must see that if he doesn’t hold to the Christian worldview he cannot make sense of anything. Only Christianity makes sense of human experience. Thus, “by his foolish presuppositions the unbeliever actually works against himself. He suppresses the clear truth about God which is foundational

¹⁵*Van Til’s Apologetic*, 174 n 51.

¹⁶This is a familiar phrase to the readers of Dr. Van Til and Dr. Bahnsen. Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 205. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 6, 485. *Always Ready*, 74, 121, 152, 253.

¹⁷Cornelius Van Til, “My Credo,” in E. R. Geehan, ed., *Jerusalem and Athens* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P and R, 1971), 21.

to an understanding of the world and of oneself, and he affirms a position which is contrary to his better knowledge. He is intellectually schizophrenic. This must be made clear to him.”¹⁸

This is effectively what Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 1:20: “Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” This is the theme of apologetics: God made foolish the wisdom of the world. Your challenge to the unbeliever is: “Where is he who can make sense out of human dignity, science, morality, and so forth?”

In the methodological challenge of Presuppositional Apologetics, this is precisely what you are doing. You are standing on your own worldview presuppositions to show that they account for both reality and reason. Then you stand upon the unbeliever’s assumptions to show that he cannot account for rationality, human experience, ethics—or anything else. As Van Til explains it:

“Since on the Reformed¹⁹ basis there is no area of neutrality between the believer and the unbeliever, the argument between them must be *indirect*. Christians cannot allow the legitimacy of the assumptions that underlie the non-Christian *methodology*. But they can place themselves upon the position of those whom they are seeking to win to a belief in Christianity for the sake of argument. And the non-Christian, though not granting the presuppositions from which the Christian works, can nevertheless place himself upon the position of the Christian for the sake of the argument.”²⁰

¹⁸Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 65.

¹⁹By “Reformed,” Dr. Van Til means the strongly Calvinistic, covenantal theological branch of evangelicalism. A good summary of the Reformed view of theology may be found in the famed doctrinal formulation known as the Westminster Confession of Faith (drawn up in the mid 1640s in England). Both Drs. Van Til and Bahnsen adhered to the Westminster Standards (the Confession of Faith plus the Larger and Shorter Catechisms).

²⁰Cornelius Van Til, *The Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 18,

Dr. Bahnsen well-summarizes the biblical view of the self-sufficient unbeliever. And if you are to be an confident, faithful, and effective apologist, you must realize the non-Christian's predicament:

The philosophy of the unbeliever has been afflicted with vanity (Rom. 1:21) so that his 'knowledge' is (in terms of his own assumptions) falsely so-called (1 Tim. 6:20) and he opposes himself by it (2 Tim. 2:25). By pitting his foolish thinking (in the name of "wisdom") against the wisdom of the gospel (which he labels "foolish") the unbeliever must be unmasked of his pretensions (1 Cor. 1:18–21) and shown that he has no apologetic for his viewpoint (Rom. 1:20) but has been left with a vain, darkened, ignorant mind which needs renewal (Eph. 4:17–24).²¹

Let us now briefly illustrate a few approaches which you can effectively use in this two-step worldview challenge to the unbeliever. Even something as mundane as the very act of sitting down to talk about God with an unbeliever or going to a concert can be used to prove God's existence.

Human experience. As you learned earlier, in the Christian worldview all facts are revelatory of God because he created them all and for his glory: "all facts show forth and thus prove the existence of God and his plan."²² All facts. Even the fact of human experience itself, such as the fact of your discussing the existence of God with an unbeliever. How is this so? What does this mean? And how can you use this in apologetics?

The unbeliever can run from God, but he cannot hide. As you begin discussing God and his existence, ask the unbeliever if he thinks your mutual discussion about God is meaningful. Point out to him that the very fact you two are talking shows that he assumes his own self-awareness whereby he knows himself, recognizes that he lives in an environment involving other self-aware humans, and sees

²¹Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 69.

²²Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 19. Cited in Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 63.

value in communication, conversation, and debate between equally self-aware beings. If he did not, he would be admitting that conversing on the existence of God—or *any subject whatsoever*—would be meaningless.

Now ask him how he accounts for human self-awareness as a fundamental factor of life. Where does it come from? How is it that man is self-aware? Put yourself in his worldview, that is, “answer a fool according to his folly.” Point out to him that his system is ultimately committed to chance (in that no God or personality governs the Universe). Remind him that from the perspective of evolution the Universe was self-created by chance (the Big Bang²⁴) and is self-diversifying by chance (exploding stars, galactic collisions, planetary accretions, mutating life forms, and so forth).

The *Humanist Manifesto III* creedalizes this non-Christian view: “Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change. Humanists recognize nature as self-existing. We accept our life as all and enough, distinguishing things as they are from things as we might wish or imagine them to be. We welcome the challenges of the future, and are drawn to and undaunted by the yet to be known.” The American Humanist Association declares the philosophy of humanism to be “a nontheistic world view that rejects all forms of supernaturalism and is in accord with the spirit and discoveries of science.” The chance-oriented, cold, impersonal Universe is the ultimate reality in his worldview. As Carl Sagan (1936–1997) put it: “the Cosmos is all there is, all there was, and all there ever will be.”

Now note that in such a naturalistic, materialistic conception of the Universe, all must be accounted for in terms of the material interaction of atoms. Point out that this forces us to view ourselves as simply matter-in-motion. Ask him how matter can be self-aware. Are rocks self-aware? Trees?

²⁴“About ten billion years ago, the Universe began in a gigantic explosion—the Hot Big Bang! Its subsequent evolution from one hundredth of a second up to the present day can be reliably described by the Big Bang model. This includes the expansion of the Universe, the origin of light elements and the relic radiation from the initial fireball, as well as a framework for understanding the formation of galaxies and other large-scale structures. In fact, the Big Bang model is now so well-attested that it is known as the standard cosmology.” (Paul Shellard, ed., “The Hot Big Bang,” University of Cambridge website [1996]: www.damtp.cam.ac.uk/user/gr/public/bb_home.html).

Hammers? In fact, what view of the world makes self-awareness intelligible? Slime is certainly not self-aware. Ask the unbeliever to explain where inert matter comes from, then how it becomes living matter, which eventually becomes self-aware, which eventually becomes rational, which eventually becomes moral—and all by the evolutionary mechanism of time plus chance.

Then point out that in your worldview (whereby you are determined to “answer not a fool according to his folly”), the personal, sovereign God of Scripture created all things and gave them their properties. And that he created man in his image, thereby establishing personality and self-awareness in us. At the very beginning God communicated with man, speaking intelligently to his rational, self-aware creature (Gen. 1:28–29) and giving him commands (Gen. 1:28; 2:16–17). Consequently, self-awareness and personality are not problems in the Christian worldview.

So then, the very self-awareness of the unbeliever is evidence for the existence of God.²⁵ This is due to “the impossibility of the contrary.”

Rationality. As you continue speaking further about your faith with your unbelieving friend, you will want to discuss the question of rationality itself. After all, you are engaged in rational discussion, seeking *reasons* for believing in God or for not believing in God.

But standing on the unbeliever’s worldview quickly demonstrates internal problems. Because of his opposition to the absolute God of Scripture, he must account for reality in some other way than by a personal, rational, sovereign Creator. In discounting an absolute mind creating and controlling the Universe, in the final analysis he is committed to chance. In his view of origins, the material Universe sprang into being from nothing and under no rational oversight. The rational, then, is built upon the irrational.

This view of origins produces insurmountable rational problems, for such a chance-based worldview can have no laws, no necessity, no logical principles, but only randomness. According to

²⁵Henry Jackson deals with self-awareness as evidence for a transcendent God in *Science, World, and Faith* (Ferndale, Wash.: BookSurge, 2005).

cosmic evolutionary theory all is ultimately subject to random change and is in a constant state of flux. But our very rationality requires laws so that things may be distinguished, classified, organized, and explained. Rational comprehension and explanation demand principles of order and unity in order to relate truths and events to one another. Consequently, on the basis of the non-believer's worldview rationality itself has no foundation.

The unbeliever may attempt to account for rationality by asserting that man's mind *imposes* order so that rationality results. If he does so, then his view of reality becomes subjective rather than objective. But even this attempt is impossible, for how can the mind impose order on a chaotic Universe?

And what if your friend denounces your Christian worldview for its being governed by "faith" as over against "reason"? What if he argues that you are naive in not employing the scientific method?

Point out to him the futility in his argument. The scientific method proceeds on the basis of observation through the senses. As the *Humanist Manifesto III* (1993) expressed it: "Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis. Humanists find that science is the best method for determining this knowledge as well as for solving problems and developing beneficial technologies."

This method holds, then, that knowledge must be limited to observation and sense perception. Once your unbelieving friend has committed to this procedure, demonstrate his epistemological self-contradiction: If all knowledge is governed by observation, then how did he come to know *that*? That is, how did he come to know that "all knowledge is governed by observation"? Did he *observe* that in the lab? Did he measure, weigh, or count it? Did he detect *that* conceptual limitation by exploring nature? And furthermore, does he observe that this principle is a *universal* limitation on knowledge in all places and at all times so that he can confidently trust it?

If he attempts to use the laws of logic in reasoning with you, ask him where in nature he has seen the laws of logic? Show him that you can't use the scientific method to prove the laws of logic, for you

can't observe, taste, or feel them since they are not material entities extended in space. How then can he justify logic? Or the scientific method of empiricism?

But with the believer's worldview, a personal, absolute Creator God accounts for the rational, coherent, law-ordered reality that you and the unbeliever both experience and depend upon. In God's sovereign revelation to man (Scripture) we learn that he spoke, "and it was so" (Gen. 1:7, 9; Ps. 33:6; 2 Cor. 4:6; Heb. 11:3). Not only do we discover order and harmony throughout the narrative of creation (Days 1 through 6 following logically one after the other²⁶), but the very idea of God's *speaking* reality into existence itself requires rationality. The Universe is ultimately rational because the rational, law-ordaining God of Scripture created it thus. Man is a rational being because he is created in the image of God, who is the standard of rationality. In Eden God commands him through verbal communication (Gen. 2:16–17); Adam authoritatively speaks (2:19–20); God reasons with him (3:1–19).

Oftentimes the unbeliever objects to the idea of faith in the Christian worldview. This is due to his basic misunderstanding of the role and function of faith, deeming it essentially a blind leap beyond the limits of reason. Yet, your Christian faith does not discount reason and logic. Rather it *requires* the use of logical reasoning because in God's mind is perfect coherence and rationality whereby he upholds (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3) and governs (Isa. 46:10–11; Eph. 1:11) all things. God is as "wise in heart" as he is "mighty in strength" (Job 9:4; cp. 12:13). The laws of logic reflect the orderly mind of God, so that man as the image of God should reflect God's rationality (see Lesson 11 for more detail). After all, God "put wisdom in the innermost being" and "has given understanding to the mind" (Job 38:36). And remember: as a Christian you are particularly called to love God with "all your mind" (Mark 12:30).

Empirical (observational, sense-based) scientific investigation is also called for in the Christian worldview because God created an objective, material Universe, governs it by predictable laws (Gen. 1:14–19; 8:22; Job 38:31–33; Jer. 33:22, 25), and placed in it a thinking, sensing man to inhabit it (Gen.

²⁶Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. and Michael R. Butler, *Yea, Hath God Said?: The Framework Hypothesis / Six-Day Creation Debate* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 52–53.

1:27–29; Ps. 8:6; 115:16b). Furthermore, God created man as a sensate, physical being, for “the hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord has made both of them” (Prov. 20:12; cp. Ex. 4:11; Ps. 94:9).

Empirical learning, then, is necessary because of the way the God-created world and God-reflecting man operate. The world is real, not imagined. The law of gravity exists because God’s mind made the world this way. God made a world that comports with our minds and calls us to go out and investigate that real, objective, sense-oriented world that he made (Gen. 1:26–28; Ps. 8:4–8; Eccl. 1:13).

The unbeliever’s problem only gets worse when he demands that we provide proof for the existence of God. Dr. Bahnsen comments on this irony:

The problem for the unbeliever is that he keeps committing himself to some (quite proper and unavoidable) requirement of ‘rationality’ and insisting upon it being honored, only to find upon analysis that only the Christian worldview coheres with it (makes it intelligible). The unbeliever has been borrowing essentially Christian ideas in epistemology, without giving God the glory and thanks. After all, given the unbeliever’s worldview, why should reasons be required for what we believe? Why should logical consistency be demanded? Why should arbitrariness be disreputable? There is no reason for the normativity of rationality.²⁷

Ask your friend: “Why do you require that I give you a reason proving God’s existence? After all, on your view there is no reason for reason itself.” Point out to him that the very fact you are discussing and debating the matter proves the existence of God, for rationality can’t be accounted for on the unbeliever’s worldview. As Dr. Van Til would express it: To slap God’s face you must first crawl onto his lap.

Aesthetics. Let’s say that you have been debating with a friend the existence of God for a couple of hours over dinner before your planned attendance at a piano concerto. The time now comes that you

²⁷Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 483 n34.

need to leave for the concert hall to enjoy the work of Johann Sebastian Bach. After it is over and you are leaving the concert hall, your friend exclaims: “What a marvelous performance of such beautiful musical works!” He has just stepped into the Christian worldview and undermined his own worldview without knowing it.

Ask him the key apologetic question: “What view of life makes the notion of ‘beauty’ intelligible?” Challenge him to declare what standard he is using whereby he may declare something is “beautiful.” Point out that on his materialist, chance, relativistic foundations, he cannot account for beauty. He has no ultimate standard for evaluation so that he may distinguish between that which is beautiful and that which is ugly.²⁸ Nor does he have any coherent, law-bound system that can associate things in such a way that certain “patterns” may be declared “beautiful.” As already noted, he cannot even account for human self-awareness so that beauty may be rationally experienced, intelligibly discussed, and aesthetically appreciated. Does a platypus “appreciate” a beautiful sunset?

Furthermore, beauty can only be appreciated in the mind. If there is no objective standard or value for beauty, it becomes simply a subjective, arbitrary, emotive experience. In addition, the prevailing naturalistic worldview cannot account for aesthetic values in man because appreciation of beauty has no survival value as per the demands of evolution.

But on the Christian worldview, the all-creating (Gen. 1; Neh. 9:6; John 1:3), all-ordering (Ps. 115:3; 135:6; Dan. 4:35; Matt. 5:45) God of Scripture is the ultimate standard of evaluation (Prov. 15:3; Eccl. 3:17; 12:14; Isa. 45:5–6, 21; 46:9). He creates a world of order that can exhibit beautiful patterns of facts. Man is created as a rational creature in the image of God so that he can discern those patterns of beauty, distinguishing them from those which lack beauty (Phil. 4:8).

²⁸An amusing notation made by economist Thomas Sowell highlights in a different context the problem we are considering in apologetics. Dr. Sowell said you should never ask an economist, “How are you doing?” This is because he will respond: “Compared to what?” Evaluations require a standard of measure.

Ethics. Now you and your unbelieving friend are traveling home from the concert. You turn on the radio and hear a distressing news item about a heinous act of child abuse. Your non-Christian friend expresses indignation at this act, complaining that this is a terrible tragedy. Once again he has stumbled into your worldview.

In your whole apologetic endeavor you must insist that the unbeliever be consistent when standing on his position. The fundamental problem with unbelief is that it *cannot* be consistent. As Dr. Van Til has argued, the unbeliever's worldview collapses into absurdity and incoherence.

How is it that the things the unbeliever and the believer both hold in common can be true? For example, how can we both agree that torturing children is wrong? Remember the key apologetic challenge: "Which worldview makes sense out of that? Which network of presuppositions?"

When you talk of child abuse with your non-Christian friend, you both agree it is wrong. But he cannot declare that it is absolutely wrong on his chance-based, relativistic worldview. Moral evaluations require an absolute standard, which the unbelieving worldview can't produce from the perspective of his chance Universe. Why shouldn't some people take advantage of a child?

Suppose your discussion leads to talking about the problem of oppressing the poor. Perhaps your friend will declare such to be immoral. You know the apologetic challenge by now. Ask him: "What outlook on reality, knowledge and ethics makes this position meaningful?" That is, on the evolutionary worldview (materialistic atheism), we must ask the question: "What is man?" Is he just an advanced animal? Renowned physicist Steven Hawking has declared: "We are just an advanced breed of monkeys on a minor planet of a very average star" (*Der Spiegel*, 1989). Is he the result of primordial slime developing by chance into the complicated, self-aware creature we know as "man"? But how can that view make sense of condemning oppression of the poor? In fact, if evolution is true, then we live in a survival of the fittest, dog-eat-dog world. We got here by clawing our way to the top, overcoming other animals. Oppression is part of our nature, part of our method for development and improvement. It is necessary and, therefore, "good."

Once again though, on your believing worldview, morality makes sense—and is even demanded: “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic. 6:8; Isa. 56:1). In fact, his word expressly commands: “Thus says the Lord, ‘Do justice and righteousness, and deliver the one who has been robbed from the power of his oppressor. Also do not mistreat or do violence to the stranger, the orphan, or the widow; and do not shed innocent blood in this place’” (Jer. 22:3; cp. Ex. 22:21–24).

The righteous and holy God of Scripture is the ultimate, eternal, absolute, perfect standard of morality (Matt. 5:48; Rom. 2:5–6). Man is created in his image so that he himself is a moral creature (Gen. 1:26; 9:6). He trades in moral currency—even as a sinner (Matt. 5:47; 7:11; Rom. 2:14–15; 7:7). The Bible reveals the objective laws of morality (Mic. 6:8a; Heb. 5:14), for example, the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1–17; Deut. 5:6–21).

If the unbeliever attempts to defend his rejection of absolute standards of morality while condemning child abuse and oppressing the poor, he may skirt the issue of objective moral standards. He often will be reduced to declaring, “I just know it is wrong.” But then morality becomes subjective, and it can’t condemn the child molester who doesn’t believe it is wrong or the rich who oppress the poor. It’s their view against his.

The unbeliever’s response

One thing you will hear from the unbeliever is: “I am a scientific, good, rational person.” To this your response should be: “Yes, you are, because you live in God’s universe and are created in his image.” You must show him that he has deceived himself about reality in denying the Creator and Governor of the Universe. The goal of unbelief is the attempt of Adam to escape the voice of God.

The unbeliever actually uses the Christian worldview without acknowledging it. You can say: “You know these things are true, otherwise you would not be able to make sense out of anything. You are

suppressing the truth in unrighteousness.” He will then deceive himself about his own deception. This may harden him more—unless the Holy Spirit intervenes.

You must understand that the unbeliever is not himself a system of thought; he is a person. For that reason, he is not true to his own system of thought. We must challenge his inconsistency with the Christian worldview, showing him the impossibility of the contrary.²⁹

Worldviews and Facts

Remembering that we must think holistically in a worldview fashion helps us realize that even mundane experiences create problems for the unbeliever—if he tries to operate consistently with his worldview. Dr. Bahnsen writes in *Always Ready*:

The beliefs which people hold are always connected to *other* beliefs by relations pertaining to linguistic meaning, logical order, evidential dependence, causal explanation, indexical and self conceptions, etc. To assert “I see a ladybug on the rose” is to affirm and assume a *number* of things simultaneously—some rather obvious (e.g., about the usage of English words, one’s personal identity, a perceptual event, categories of bugs and flowers, physical relations), others more subtle (e.g., about one’s linguistic, entomological, and botanical competence, the normalcy of one’s eyes and brain-stem, theories of light refraction, shared grammar and semantics, the reality of the external world, laws of logic, etc.)³⁰

In taped lectures elsewhere on transcendental arguments, Dr. Bahnsen provides a helpful example of how unbelievers look at things differently. With Christ we might demand of the unbeliever: “Consider the

²⁹Dr. Van Til notes that the unbeliever cannot be consistent with his own worldview assumptions. If he were, his worldview would become absurd as he “integrates downward into the void.”

³⁰Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 216.

lilies” (Luke 12:27). The unbeliever is stymied—in his system. The simple flower shows the explanatory power of Christian theism over against anti-theism.

1. The unbeliever can’t explain matter. He can’t understand the origin of the flower, making sense of its material composition. Where did it come from? How does the Big Bang explain the flower?

2. He can’t explain induction. That is, he is unable to explain the flower’s history and development, since his system is materialistic and the process of induction is not.

3. He can’t account for logic. He can’t explain the flower’s conception which requires logic in order to even talk about flowers, in that it requires the universals of “flowerness” and “dirtiness.” (See Lesson 11 for discussion of universals.)

4. He can’t explain values. He can’t account for value judgments about flowers. He has no account for aesthetic or ethical values. What do we do about the flower? The Christian sees it reflecting God’s glory and reminding him of his moral obligation to praise God. The unbeliever can simply stomp on it as having no value whatsoever—*if* he follows out his own worldview consistently.

5. He can’t explain the flower’s adaptation to its environment. Why is it related to anything else in the random world? Why can things outside of me be made suitable to my purposes?

6. He can’t explain the explanation of flower. In a chance Universe of ultimate randomness, he can’t account for unity, differentiation, and classes of things in order to explain what he means by “flower.”

7. He has no way to explain our consciousness of flowers. We are self conscious, the flower is not. How is this so since I am but matter-in-motion?

So then, in your apologetic enterprise, you must demonstrate that Christianity alone is rational. As Dr. Bahnsen summarizes it:

“Differing worldviews can be compared to each other in terms of the important philosophical question about the ‘preconditions of intelligibility’ for such important

assumptions as the universality of logical laws, the uniformity of nature, and the reality of moral absolutes. We can examine a worldview and ask whether its portrayal of nature, man, knowledge, etc., provide an outlook in terms of which logic, science and ethics can make sense. It does not comport with the practices of natural science to believe that all events are random and unpredictable, for instance. It does not comport with the demand for honesty in scientific research, if no moral principle expresses anything but a personal preference or feeling. Moreover, if there are internal contradictions in a person's worldview, it does not provide the preconditions for making sense out of man's experience. For instance, if one's political dogmas respect the dignity of men to make their own choices, while one's psychological theories reject the free will of men, then there is an internal defect in that person's worldview."

In his final lecture, Dr. Bahnsen will expand on these problems for the unbeliever, providing us much material for contemplation. You must recognize the fundamental idea in all apologetical encounters: You are asking which worldview can resolve the foundational questions. You grant the unbeliever the opportunity to respond to the challenge. Then you present to him the Christian foundations which alone can give meaning to human experience.

III. Questions Raised

1. What specific Bible passage sets up the two-fold structure of the apologetic challenge to the unbeliever?
2. What does the Bible mean when it speaks of a "fool"?
3. What are the two particular aspects of the biblical apologetic challenge to unbelief? Briefly explain each of the two steps of apologetics.
4. In what limited circumstances should you adopt the unbeliever's worldview?

5. Why should you avoid arguing that Christianity is the “best” position to hold? What should you argue instead?
6. In the final analysis, what phrase by Dr. Van Til capsulizes the biblical proof of God, displaying the very essence of our argument?
7. What do we mean when we speak of the “preconditions of intelligibility”?
8. How is our very self-awareness an argument for God’s existence?
9. Explain how the Christian worldview establishes logic while the non-Christian worldview can’t.
10. How would you respond to someone who claims to use the “scientific method,” which asserts that all knowledge comes by way of observational analysis through sense experience?
11. How would you show the futility of unbelief by the unbeliever’s declaring child abuse or oppressing the poor to be morally wrong?
12. How can a flower be used to show the incoherence of the non-Christian worldview?

IV. Practical Applications

1. Search either on the Internet or in a print Encyclopedia for articles on the “Big Bang.” Draw out from those articles citations that establish chance as the source of the Big Bang which brought about all of reality. Put them in your apologetics folder.
2. Two sound, evangelical creationist groups are well known in America: The Institute for Creation Research (www.icr.org) and “Answers in Genesis” (www.answersingenesis.org). Though they both hold to the same understanding of Scripture and creation, they differ in their apologetic methodology. Go on-line to both of their sites and read some of their articles to see if you discover which one is more compatible with the Presuppositional Apologetic.
3. Talk to an unbelieving friend about self-awareness and where he thinks it derives from. Discuss with him the Christian foundations for human self-awareness.

4. Talk with an unbelieving friend about the scientific method. Ask him if he thinks all knowledge comes through empirical evidence. Challenge him with the problems with such a view.
5. Go on the Internet, search for and read some reviews of art. See if you can point out the assumption of a standard of beauty while there are subtle indicators of a denial of Christian worldview.
6. Read your local newspaper editorials and letters-to-the editor. Watch for an article or letter that tries both to discount Christianity and to affirm a particular moral position. Using the material in our lessons, frame a brief letter exposing the futility of claiming a moral point-of-view while writing off Christianity. Send it to the newspaper.
7. Using this lesson, work up a one lesson Bible study illustrating the biblical apologetic. Ask your pastor if he will look over it with you, then see if you can teach it in a Sunday school class.
8. Consider taking a distance learning course in apologetics from a Presuppositional Apologetics perspective. Several are available through Dr. Bahnsen's ministry, Southern California Center for Christian Studies.

V. Recommended Reading

Bahnsen, Greg L., "Origins, Revelation, and Science": www.cmfnow.com/articles/pa001.htm

Aniol, Scott, "The Believer's Pursuit of Beauty":

http://weblog.karaministries.com/archives/2005/03/29/the_believers_pursuit_of_beauty_conclusions_from_adler.php

"The Christian Worldview, the Atheist Worldview, and the Laws of Logic":

www.carm.org/atheism/logic.htm

"Aesthetic Arguments for the Existence of God": www.quodlibet.net/williams-aesthetic.shtml

Finnamore, David J., "Beauty, Wisdom and Truth": www.elvenminstrel.com/kontext/beautywisdomtruth.htm

Hodges, John Mason, “Aesthetics and the Place of Beauty in Worship:

www.crichton.edu/iaca/aesthetics_beauty.htm

“Presuppositional Apologetics”: www.carm.org/apologetics/presuppositional.htm

John Safarti “Loving God with all your mind: logic and creation”:

www.answersingenesis.org/tj/v12/i2/logic.asp