

Introduction

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

The course taught by Dr. Bahnsen is called: *Basic Training for Defending the Christian Faith*. It deals with “apologetics.” The word “apologetics” is derived from the combination of two Greek words: *apo* (“back, from”) and *logos* (“word”), meaning “to give a word back, to respond” in defense. We find this Greek word in several New Testament texts. When Paul was in the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 21:27), some Asian Jews aroused the city against him (21:30a). The crowd dragged him out of the temple in an attempt to kill him (21:31). The Roman soldiers intervened and arrested him, taking him into protective custody (21:32–33). He was soon allowed to address the Jews to present his defense (21:39–40). He opens with these words: “Brethren and fathers, hear my *defense* [Gk., *apologias*] which I now offer to you” (Acts 22:1).

In his first epistle, Peter instructs all Christians how they should conduct themselves. In chapter 3 he exhorts them to be faithful even when persecuted (1 Peter 3:9-13). Rather than becoming fearful and withdrawing from the opposition or becoming angry and responding in kind, he urges them to: “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a *defense* [Gk., *apologian*] to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (3:15). This becomes the key scriptural passage urging Christians to defend their faith.

In his important work on apologetics, Dr. Bahnsen quotes Cornelius Van Til's succinct and helpful definition of “apologetics”: “Apologetics is the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of

life.”¹ This is what we will be studying. Christian apologetics does not teach that we are apologizing, as if admitting moral wrong or mental error.

Before we begin we will make three procedural notations: First, be aware that in the video series Dr. Bahnsen uses the America Standard Version (ASV) of 1901. He favored this translation because of its strongly literal approach to translation theory. Due to its being difficult to find today, however, we will be using the New American Standard Bible (NASB). This is a strongly conservative, evangelical translation that follows the original ASV in attempting to be literal.

Second, we will find that some key words and technical terms may be unfamiliar, requiring definition. Any term being defined in this study guide will be displayed in a sans serif type font to set it off from the rest of the text. This will alert you to our definition which will either appear in the main text or in a footnote. We will also provide a Glossary of all these terms in an Appendix. Learning the jargon in apologetics will increase your understanding of the method of apologetics itself. In fact, in his last lecture, Dr. Bahnsen will mention the importance of defining terms any time you are debating.

Third, as we study each lecture, we will follow the same basic outline. We will first summarize Dr. Bahnsen’s *Central Concerns* fleshing them out with additional detail. Concentrating on central issues is important to understanding—and even biblically warranted. Jesus directed the Pharisees to understand the central significance of Scripture when he urged them to focus on him (John 5:39; cp. Luke 24:25–27). He rebuked them for highlighting minutiae and forgetting the central, weightier issues: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have

¹Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998), 34.

neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others” (Matt. 23:23).

After this we will provide *Exegetical*² *Observations* on important biblical texts relevant to the study, driving home the biblical warrant for Dr. Bahnsen’s instruction. This is in keeping with Paul’s commendation that we be diligent in “handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Luke commends the Bereans, noting that they “were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, *examining the Scriptures daily*, to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). This is important, for as Max Reich (1867–1945) once wrote: “the Christian who is careless in Bible reading will be careless in Christian living.”

Then we will ask *Review Questions* to stir your memory of the material. God often calls us to remember things (e.g., Ps. 105:5; Eccl. 12:1; Isa. 46:8). He even memorializes certain redemptive issues by providing “review lessons” through ceremonial rituals (e.g., Ex. 12:14; 1 Cor. 11:23–25). Review enhances memory.

Following this we will offer *Practical Applications* of the material to enhance your educational experience as a Christian. Your Christian commitment requires both understanding *and* doing (James 1:22; Matt. 7:24–27; Luke 6:46–49). Our course work will stick with you better if you actively work through the lessons and their application assignments.

Finally, we will provide a *Recommended Reading* list to supplement your study of the issues. As Christians you should be eager to gain greater knowledge of the issues through

²“Exegesis” is based on two Greek words: *ex*, which means “out of” (we derive our English word “exit” from it) and *ago*, which means “to go.” That is, “exegesis” is that which “goes out from” the text. It is the meaning rooted in the text which is carefully drawn out of it (*not read into it*) through proper interpretive procedures.

research. The Lord encourages searching out things, when he teaches you: “Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you”

(Matt. 7:7).

Come, then, let us reason together.