

BIBLICAL PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

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I. Introduction

A. Purpose

1. Not to give you a theological or philosophical lecture
2. Not to confuse you with a system of heavy arguments
3. To **challenge you to think about how you defend the truth** and how you can perfect your ability to make a defense
4. To focus you on a biblical, presuppositional apologetic and offer an example as to how it is used in the street

B. Questions

1. How do you answer the critic, cultist, so-called atheist or post-modernist?
2. How do you reply to the one who see no convincing evidence that the Bible is true saying it is just a book written by men?
3. What do you say to the Mormon, the Jew, the Catholic, or the Muslim?

II. What is Apologetics?

A. Definition

1. **Apologia** – a defense
 - a reply to a formal charge
 - a defense of one's innocence
 - it is presumed innocence, not presumed guilt
2. **Christian Apologetics** – Our statement as to why Christ is innocent of the charges made against him.

More formally, The vindication (or justification) of the Christian world-view against various forms of non-Christian worldviews – protecting Christianity from attack.

3. Note: Acts 22:1
Acts 24:10-11
Acts 25:16
Acts 26:1

B. Relation to Evangelism

Apologetics is evangelistic and it supports evangelism

1. Paul's statement of Evangelism (1 Cor. 15:3,4)
2. Paul's relates evangelism to Apologetics (Phil. 1:7)

C. A Moral Obligation—1 Peter 3:15: “The Magna Carta of Apologetic Texts”

1. Apologetics is non negotiable, “always ready” (15b).
For pastors and teachers (Titus 1:9)
For everyone (Jude 3)
2. Apologetics is giving a **reason** or **answer** for the hope (15c).
This answer will close their mouth (Psm. 8:2; Isa. 52:15; Rom. 3:19; Titus 2:6-8)
The unbeliever is literally “without an apologetic” (Rom. 1:20)
 - a. Apologetics is not **persuasion** – the Holy Spirit must be the One to persuade and give faith.

- b. Apologetics is not **subjectivism**—an inner conviction of salvation or assurance of truth given by the Holy Spirit. While this assurance is true, truth is not subjective, but objective in God.
 - c. Apologetics is not **relativism**—saying something is “true for me” in distinction from that which is true for someone else. Feelings do not make something true.
- 3. Apologetics gives rational answers in the **right** way.
 - a. A mind submitted to Christ (15a)
 - b. Spoken with a proper attitude (15d)
 - gentleness: avoiding contentiousness—presenting an irrefutable argument with the right spirit
 - reverence: humility, love—avoid provoking (Eph. 4:15; 2 Tim. 2:25)

D. Summary

Why do we defend the faith? It is the command of God!

- a. We defend Christ when He is ridiculed; not when we are ridiculed!
- b. While God needs nothing, He chooses to use us!
 - Acts 17:25
 - Numbers 22
 - Luke 19:40

III. The Place of Reason in Apologetics

A. Reason is a tool—the ability to reason is part of the image of God in man (Gen. 1:26).

Matt. 22:37: Love the Lord with all your mind!

Luke 2:52: Christ grew in wisdom

B. Reason must be the servant of Revelation (God’s Word).

- 1. Isa. 1:18 “Come let us reason together” really says come let’s set the record straight in it’s context.
- 2. Human reasoning results in foolishness (Rom. 1:22), delusion (Col. 2:4), and deception (Col. 2:8).
- 3. Biblical reasoning is truth and life (Rom. 1:25; 2 Cor. 10:5-6).

C. Reason cannot be understood as an independent or ultimate authority.

- 1. All knowledge and correct reasoning comes from Christ (Col. 2:3). In Him are hidden ALL the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
- 2. **There are two kinds of people** (Romans 1:25):
 - a. **Christians**, who worship and serve the **Creator** rather than the creature
 - b. **Non-Christians**, who worship and serve the **creature** rather than the Creator

Non-Christians think **independently** of God’s Creation. They judge God. They are their own “god”

Christians think **dependently**—submitting to God’s truth

John 14:6: “I am truth.”

Prov 1:7: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Knowledge.”

- 3. The **opposite of truth** (true knowledge) is **not ignorance, but rebellion** and foolishness:
 - a. Matt. 12:30—“He who is not with Me is against Me...”
 - b. Eph. 4:17-19—Ignorance, hardness, callous, sensuality, impurity

- c. Prov. 1:7b—Fools are ones who are smart but use their mind to deliberately reject God. They progress from naivete and simplicity, to scoffing, to hatred of true knowledge (Prov 1:22). A Bible fool is one who lives in a settled state of deliberate rejection of the truth.
- d. 1 Sam. 26:21—Fools hate God.
- e. Prov. 14:3—A fool is proud.

The unbeliever's problem is **moral, ethical and spiritual**, rather than **intellectual**—they will not be told.

4. The matter of apologetics

Apologetics uses reasoning from the Scripture to show unbelievers that without God:

- They are a **fool** (Psm. 14:1).
- They cannot **account** for any knowledge, morality, unity, invariance in his world, science or anything. Rom. 1:22.
- They cannot **make sense out of life**.
- They have **no basis** to object to the truth 1 Cor. 1:20.

IV. Toward a Biblical Apologetic

A. Man is not epistemologically neutral.

Epistemology addresses one's theory of knowledge or source of truth.

Eph. 2:1-2—Dead in trespasses and sins

Rom. 1:18-20—Man has an inescapable sense of deity (Calvin)

vs. 20—He has knowledge of the true God from the creation:

1. God's eternal power, omnipotence
2. God's character, His unchanging glory, unity, and consistence

vs. 18: They **suppress** (holds down) the truth in unrighteousness.

1. They are a spiritual weasel!
2. They rebel in pride against the truth.
3. This suppression is beneath the threshold of his working consciousness.
4. They pretend to be neutral.

*** We do not have to prove God to the unbeliever—he already knows God.**

Rom. 2:14,15—Their conscience accuses them. In contradiction to their view they continue to rely on God!

vs. 21-22—They offer lame excuses, vain reasoning, speculations, foolishness

1. Only because God is in their hearts they know all about science, medicine, baseball, rockets and music, but they get it all wrong. They do not know as they ought to know.

Believers and unbelievers do not ultimately agree on anything because each interprets every "fact" from a different starting point. At the same time unbelievers borrow from the believer's worldview because their own view does not make sense, but they will not admit it.

2. For the unbeliever, God's creation becomes a proof for His non-existence. Brown cows eat green grass and produce white milk without out God and thus become a proof that God does not exist. Dan 5: 22-23 "But God in whose hand are your life-breth,you're your ways, you have not glorified." Hosea 2:8: "For she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain...which they used for Baal."
3. Their wisdom becomes foolishness.

B. Man's Problem is not intellectual but moral.

Rom. 1:18 – Willful suppression

2 Cor. 10:5 – Speculations, prideful and lofty thoughts outside of God must be destroyed and taken captive by obedience.

Think about your own conversion.

- Did you become a Christian by using your superior intellectual ability as the ultimate authority to judge of the evidence of the credibility of Christ?
- You became a Christian when you bowed your heart and mind in repentance with submission to the Lordship of Christ.

C. In the end, all men have faith.

Gen. 1:1 – “In the beginning God”

Gen. 3:5 – Faith in themselves as god

Unbelievers say that they have facts but their facts rest in nothing, chance, irrationality. They offer no intelligible basis on which to build a worldview.

The question must ultimately become for every man, “What is the object of your faith?”.

D. Evidentialism – A misguided approach to apologetics

Commonly called **semi-rationalism**, **classical**, or **empirical** apologetics, it is the method of Catholics, Armenians and many inconsistent Calvinists.

Evidentialism: A methodology that believes that there is common ground (or natural theology) between the believer and the unbeliever, holding that man's mind is neutral and is capable of judging of the credibility of truth. The evidentialist **puts God on trial using the unbeliever's mind as a neutral court**. He appeals to reason and proceeds to faith using empirical evidences or historically verifiable facts to argue a probability case for God. He argues the Christian view appealing to the laws of logic and so-called neutral evidences, seeking to avoid circular reasoning in favor of flat-line reasoning. Evidentialists have starting points or presuppositions, but seek to prove the **probability** or **permissibility** of them before presenting them. Evidentialism is reflected in the following positions.

Roman Catholics (Aquinas and the Scholastic Philosophers) use traditional arguments for God (including **Cosmological**, having to do with the nature of the universe; **Ontological**, having to do with the nature and relations of being; **Anthropological**, having to do with human beings as to their origin, distribution, etc; and **Teleological**, having to do with design or purpose.) to build a probability case for God. They start with **reason** and proceed to the probability of **faith**.

Arminianism argues that man's mind is neutral and when presented with evidences he will yield to Christ. Bishop Butler, in his famous **Analogy**, used nature to build a probability case for life after death against Deism in the 18th Century. He said that a “reasonable use of reason” could interpret aright “the course and constitution of nature.” Butler went on to say that “revealed religion is rendered credible by analogy and the evidences of miracles and prophecy.” “The whole of religion then is throughout credible” In the same way, John Warwick Montgomery claimed to be “...drug, kicking and screaming across the threshold of grace by the sheer weight of the evidence.” Norman Geisler stands tall in this tradition.

Inconsistent Calvinism uses some form of common ground or points of agreement in appealing to the laws of logic and natural uniformity to build a case for God. They would present so-called neutral evidences to build a probability case for God. Charles Hodge wrote, "Man can judge of the credibility of a Revelation." John Gerstner and R.C. Sproul build a probability case for God from nature while claiming to avoid circular reasoning at every level. J.P. Moreland builds a permissible case in similar fashion. E.J. Carnell argues for pre-evangelism with evidences before the gospel can be presented. Josh McDowell calls for "faith based on fact."

The Problems

1. The facts do not speak for themselves.

Matt. 28:17 – Men who saw the resurrected Lord did not believe.

Rom. 11:33-36 – Gods does not go outside Himself to prove Himself.

2. Unbelievers cannot and do not give God a fair trial according to our theology.

3. Evidential apologetics grants the unbeliever too much.

The Evidentialist grants the unbeliever the right to think as an unbeliever (**autonomously**) while at the same time asking him to give up his unbelief (autonomy). This is theologically impossible. The unbeliever will always employ his tools of reason to reduce the contents of Scripture to naturalism.

Evidentialism is the last pocket of Arminian leprosy in the bosom of Calvinism!

V. A Presuppositional Apologetic

A. What is Presuppositionalism?

It is a view that places the Christian worldview and it's starting point **over against** the non-Christian worldview and it's starting point! It places presuppositions (or ultimate starting points) **over against** other presuppositions. It addresses the **pre-conditions of intelligent thought**. It attacks the unbeliever with a **head-on collision** presenting him with the **opposite** of what he believes. It understands that common ground is not "facts" upon which both agree, but rather the inescapable sense of Deity that exists in every sinner (Romans 1:18-22).

Presuppositionalism presents reason and evidences within a biblical framework and thus reasons from faith to faith. It calls the unbeliever to submit to the Lordship of Christ, thinking His thoughts after Him (2 Cor. 10:5) lest he be a fool. **The Presuppositionalist puts the unbeliever on trial and exposes his true problem.** It defends the truth in a way consistent with the truth.

B. The Features of Presuppositionalism

1. A head-on collision with the unbeliever

- a. The opposite of foolishness is truth – call him from sin to obedience (Isa. 1:18).
- b. He must take his faith out of himself and put it in Christ.
- c. Challenge his proud right to judge God – confront his pre-commitment to naturalism.
- d. Ask him to embrace the Christian faith and its Christian evidences not as an irrational leap of faith, but as faith rooted in biblical reasoning.

2. An absolute case rather than mere probable or permissibility

- a. Christianity offers absolute certainty.
 - Acts 2:36 – "All the house of Israel knows for certain..."
 - Luke 1:4 – "So that you may know the exact truth..."

- John 20:31 – “These things were written that you might believe...”
- b. Christianity offers **infallible** proofs.
 - The witness of God in nature and in man’s conscience
 - The uniqueness of the Bible in all of history
 - The authority of Scripture – it speaks like no other book
 - The incomparable message of the Bible – it alone calls for a broken submission to God in repentance and biblical faith
 - The miracles, the resurrection, the fulfillment of biblical prophecy
- 3. A fundamental conflict over the issue of authority
 - a. A Christian witness
 - 1.) **Begin with a clear presentation of the gospel with the full assurance that it is true and fully defensible.**
 - a) Ask for the opportunity to present the Christian worldview.
 - b) Present God, creation, holiness, sin, Christ’s person and work, man’s human condition, salvation, repentance, faith and man’s need for dependence on Christ.
 - 2.) **Call for the unbeliever to submit to his creator and to use his mind to think dependently upon God rather than independently outside of God.**
 - 3.) **Answer honest questions of understanding.**
Present Christian answers and Christian evidences based on the Christian worldview.
 - 4.) **Call for repentance and faith.**
 - b. A Christian defense
 - Example: “I see no convincing evidence that the Bible is true – it is just a book written by men.”
 - 1.) **Answer from truth (Proverbs 26:4).**
 - a) The principle: Do not answer a fool according to **his** philosophy or you will be like him – to argue from his worldview is to **encourage** his rebellion.
 - b) The application: Reason with him **from** the Bible.
 - Press him back to the Bible.
 - Insist that the Bible is the only possible position.
 - c) Example:
 - My answer is rooted in the Bible, Acts 17:23-24.
 - Allow me to present the Christian explanation for this question:
 - 1.) The evidence of Scripture (O.T.), 1 Cor. 15:3-4
 - 2.) The evidence of the external world, 1 Cor. 15:5-7
 - 3.) The evidence of personal experience, 1 Cor. 15:8
 - Expose the reason why the unbeliever rejects your answer.
Ask the “**Why**” question to push him back to his starting point of self authority or autonomy.
 - Why do you reject the message of the Bible?
 - Why do you reject its claim of inspiration?
 - What authority gives you the basis to reject the Bible?
 - Conclusion: He has no credible reason as to why he rejects Christ, save his **pride** (1 Cor. 1:20).
 - 2.) **Answer from folly (Proverbs 26:5).**
 - a) The principle: Answer him according to his folly (what his folly deserves) by showing him what God says about his worldview.

- b) The application: Do a brief internal critique of his worldview showing him that his position reduces to absurdity. Turn the unbeliever's beliefs back on him.
- A worldview based on nothing cannot account for anything.
 - Show him that in his heart he is a theist, for **atheism presupposes theism**.
 - He borrows from the Christian worldview to make sense out of his view for he is inherently religious.
- c) Example:

- Based on his worldview, knowledge is impossible. He cannot account for anything he believes from within his worldview. He continues to make absolute or superstatements without authority.
- His worldview reduces to his own arbitrary self-invented ideas. His independent commitment is based on his own independent commitment. ("The god he believes in is the one he sees in the mirror." — John MacArthur)
- How can he possibly know enough to stand in judgement of the God of the Bible. His "certain" positions (i.e. superstatements) are actually uncertain as they are based in his own conclusions.
- In denying theism, he has assumed theism. He is self deceived, for in an effort to deny God he assumes God for the laws of logic, laws of non-contradiction and morality that allow him to assert truth. In biblical terms, he is a fool (Psm. 14:1; Rom. 1:21; Col. 2:3-4).
- The unbeliever is proving that Christianity is true by borrowing its foundation to assert his unbelief. He is saying—given God's creation, man's reflection of God's image and God's laws of logic—I choose to rebel against God.

3.) Press your apologetic advantage.

- a) **The Bible can explain everything.** God created everything and gives life, natural order and the laws of logic.
- b) **The unbeliever has no credible argument against God (1 Cor. 1:20).**
- c) **Return to the gospel.**
At first, the unbeliever says it is foolish to think:
 - that man would need one to die for him.
 - that man should be confronted with his sin.
 - that man should need to understand the cross.

Now it is wise for he is a fool who rejects the Lord.

4. The reason for our hope: the impossibility of the contrary

- a. A transcendental argument is one that transcends normal patterns of thought and speaks to the possibility of intelligible thought or rationality. It is a clash of ultimate starting points.
- b. It places the **unbeliever's** circular reasoning, which is filled with self-contradiction and irrationalism, over against the **believer's** circular reasoning based on the Bible, which makes total sense out of life.
- c. The proof of God's existence is the impossibility of the contrary.
 - 1.) If Christianity is not true, then nothing is true (Prov. 1:7).
 - 2.) Without the Christian worldview, no position is possible.
 - 3.) The Bible is the precondition of all rational thought.

- 4.) Unbelievers need God to account for the laws of logic, inductive reasoning, uniformity in nature, predication, human dignity, an invariant moral code, science, mathematics and everything that underlies all their thinking.
- 5.) Unbelievers use what God gave them to ridicule Him (Isa. 45:21; Hos. 2:8; Acts 17:28).
- 6.) The unbeliever has rejected God with foolish pride.
- d. We must call for the unconditional surrender of the unbeliever to Christ so that he would think God's thought's after Him (2 Cor. 10:5).
- e. **The unbeliever is as foolish as the little girl, sitting on her father's knee, depending on him for everything while she slaps him in the face.**

C. Some Final Questions

- 1. Why do I believe Christ is the Savior of Men?
 - Because Christ said He was the Savior and Lord (His Claim).
- 2. Why do I believe what He says?
 - Because it is presented in the Bible, the Word of God, and I believe it is the very Word of God.
- 3. Why do I believe the Bible to be true?
 - Because through reading it, Christ has convicted me and saved me.
 - Because without the Bible nothing makes sense – not the past, present or future. Not morality, reasoning, understanding.
 - Because without the Bible I would be a fool (Psm. 14:1).
 - Because Christianity is the only possible position.

D. The Challenge

- 1. Thinking through a Presuppositional Apologetic
 - MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*; Acts 17:22-34
 - Bahnsan, *Always Ready* also *Van Til's Apologetic*
 - Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* also *Why I believe in God*
- 2. Some starting points
 - a. Knowing the strength of our defense, declare the gospel of truth with unique authority.
 - b. Do not prove God's existence to those who already know Him in their hearts.
 - c. Do not encourage the unbeliever's rebellion, but rather challenge it with biblically centered arguments.
 - d. Speak the truth in love (1 Peter 1:15).
 - e. Use presuppositional apologetics in dealing with every kind of objection to the truth.
 - f. Use presuppositional apologetics in your teaching and counseling ministries.

The Conflict of Worldviews

Creator (GOD)

Independent Creator

"In the beginning God..."

Source of all truth (a priori)



Creation (Man)

Dependent creation

True Knowledge of God

and His creation

True righteousness



Believers	Unbelievers
Worship the Creator	Worship the creature – "self"
Think God's thoughts after Him • In principle (noetic effects of sin) • Dependent reasoning (biblical)	Reject God's thoughts, but do not live that way. They know God, but do not glorify Him as God ("truth") • Inconsistent: ** In rebellion, they assert independence (pretended neutrality and autonomy) ** In reality they continue to think according to the remaining effects of God's image in them. "A-theism presupposes Theism." • Depend on God for the laws of logic, uniformity in nature, human dignity, a moral code (Rom. 2:14-15).

Speak to unbelievers with confidence that they are made in God's image, putting the unbeliever on trial (2 Cor. 10:5).

Comparison of Apologetic Systems

Evidentialism	Presuppositionalism	Fideism
Reason is an independent, ultimate authority and a neutral enterprise	Reason is a tool of revelation and is never neutral, including the laws of logic	Reason is inappropriate; truth is inaccessible to reason
Reason-to-faith; independent rationality	Reason from faith-to-faith; dependent rationality	Suspend reason and leap to faith
Knowledge – Common ground or “Brute Facts”	Knowledge – No agreement, all facts are “interprefacts”; only Romans 1:18-22 in common	Same
Opposite of true knowledge is ignorance	Opposite of true knowledge is rebellion and foolishness	Same
Joins with the unbeliever using common “truth”	Head-on collision with the unbeliever – the truth is the opposite of his position	Does not reason with the unbeliever
Argues a Probability case for Christianity	Argues an Absolute proof for God from the impossibility of the contrary “atheism presupposes theism”	Makes no argument, merely quotes Scripture; denies the possibility of an apologetic
“Christianity is the most logical view”	“Christianity is the only view”	“Repent”
Uses classic probability arguments developed by Aquinas and others	Uses the transcendental argument setting competing worldviews against each other	Uses no arguments
Presents neutral evidences and arguments introducing presuppositions later	Presents “Christian Evidences” and arguments based on one’s presupposition	Presents faith without arguments or evidence
God is on trial	The unbeliever is on trial	No trial takes place

Conclusion of Presuppositionalism: We cannot grant the unbeliever his autonomy and at the same time expect him to reason to the position of giving up his autonomy. We must exploit the last stronghold to which the unbeliever retreats. Evidentialism is the last pocket of Arminian leprosy in the bosom of Calvinism. Fideism is unacceptable in light of the biblical mandate (Prov. 26:4,5; 1 Pet. 3:15).

Common Non-Christian Worldviews

World View	Presupposition	Source of Truth	Line of Reasoning	Answer
Christianity	"In the beginning God."	"Thy Word is truth" which is absolute truth	Submission to the will and intellect of the absolute God.	None
Atheism	In the beginning man	Man is capable of judging of god's existence	There is no God "I am my own god"	Absurd and arbitrary opinion which assume theism and omniscience for meaning. Self refuting
Agnostic	Man starts from within himself without any outside special revelation	Man is capable of judging of god's existence.	God is unknown and unknowable	Same
Skeptic	Man starts from within himself without any outside special revelation	Man is capable of judging of god's existence	The existence of god is doubtful	Same
Modernist(Hegel)	The ultimacy of the laws of logic and individual "common sense" thinking	Objective knowledge is tested by reason and truth is established outside God (chance)	God and the super-natural are not possible	Criteria for establishment is arbitrary and dependent on theism for meaning
Cultural Relativist	Everything is relative to the speaker's mind --no moral judgments made	Man is the source and measure of all truth	All truth is relative	The absolute nature of this view of truth is self refuting
Nihilist (Postmod)	Everything is relative to the speaker's mind--no moral judgments made	Relative truth flows out of the individual as self is the source of truth	There is no truth (absolute truth)	This itself is an absolute (and arbitrary) statement of truth
Theo. Liberal	Man's sincerity and imagination can produce a religion that makes all happy	Truth is learned by an absolute dependence on subjective understanding	God is what I sense and taste him to be	All judgments or evaluation of God is arbitrary speculation and rebellion
Neo-Orthodox	Man's subjective judgment is the beginning of reality and ultimately determinative of god	Truth is obtained as man is empowered by god through existential encounter	The Bible becomes the word of God as it speaks to me	You have become your own god! (arbitrary)
RCC/ EOC	Reality begins with man guessing about god, the Bible and religion	Truth is found in the Bible as corrected by tradition & experience.	Roman Catholic/EOC teachings are ultimate	Exchange faith in a self conceived god for faith in the living true God
Orthodox Jew	Same	Truth is found in the Bible as informed by Jewish tradition (Talmud) & speculation	Denial of the Messiah along with other humanist claims	Same
Muslim	Same	Truth is found in the Bible as "cleared up" by the Koran	The Scriptures must be rejected for the Koran	Same
Mormon	Same	Acceptance of Joseph Smith's corrections & addition to the Bible through a subjective conclusion	The Scriptures must be rejected for Mormon teaching	Same

