

Apologetics -2 Knowledge & Presuppositions

Since apologetics is defending the Christian faith, giving proofs for the faith, and going on the offense against unbelieving thoughts, it is important to understand how the Bible describes knowledge, knowing, and truth. If we misunderstand how unbelievers think and reason, we may be in the position of using music with the tone-deaf, or colour palettes with the colour-blind.

Key Text:

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

Another translation puts it this way:

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

- 1) Christians must strive to “cast down” those systems of thought that are contrary to Biblical teaching. That is, they should not allow any anti-Christian ways of thinking within their own minds. Beyond ourselves, Christians are to challenge those philosophies and religions that contradict the Bible no matter where one finds them. It’s biblical to expose and challenge all anti-Christian ideas, whether within one’s own mind or in the broader culture.

Implication: We do not think that the unbeliever is a “reasonable fellow” who happens to be missing some Bible facts. We believe he is captive to entire thought systems that are unbiblical and need to be exposed as such. In other words, the burden of proof to show a reasonable worldview is not on Christians, but on the unbeliever, since his is the incoherent worldview.

- 2) In all our thinking, Christ is to be recognized as Lord. We saw this in 1 Peter 3:15
“but 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, yet with gentleness and reverence;

Implication: The Bible’s worldview should inform all our thinking and reasoning. We begin with God as true, and every man a liar. What God says is the starting point, interpretive point and end-point. One does not try to defend or propagate Christianity from a supposedly neutral standpoint. Instead, biblical teaching should influence all thinking. Believers need to develop a Bible-soaked logic, a way of thinking that is saturated with biblical principles.

Implication: Reason itself suggests that reality is logical. But to suppose that a “random” universe is logical is contradictory. If it is logical, then that logic must be sourced in the One who is Himself logical. There is not reason or logic in an entirely random, chaotic universe. If someone is reasoning, he is already borrowing from the Christian worldview, where a reasonable God made a reasonable universe in which we can reason together.

1) The Basis of Knowledge

What is the basis for knowledge? How do we determine that something is true or false?

Truth what corresponds to reality. But how do we arrive at this reality?



Empiricism: fact collecting through direct or instrumental observation.

Rationalism: using inductive or deductive reasoning to arrive at conclusions that are logically certain.

Intuition: look to internal or corporate experience, or what appears to be common sense

Authority: look to a past or present source of authoritative or expert knowledge or wisdom.

Reality is existence as God has made it and sustains it. This is what Christians presuppose. Therefore, God's reality can only be understood from His perspective. You can only know what is, when you begin with the Author and Sustainer of what is.

Let's put it this way. Reality is a collection of trillions of facts: objects, events and phenomena. Not only the individual facts, but the connections and relationships between those facts that make proper sense of them and rightly interpret them. How many of these facts and these interpretations would you need to know to understand all of reality? Who has access to that kind of knowledge?

Therefore, you can only understand any portion of reality, when you understand all of reality. That means, you can only understand any portion of reality when you receive its proper interpretation from the One who does understand it all. God has given His interpretation of Reality in publicly revealed, and publicly recorded books, collectively called the Bible.

Christians presuppose that the ultimate standard for determining the truth or falsity of anything is God's Word. Scripture can be judged by no higher authority than Scripture itself. Believers accept a biblical world-view. This does not mean we do not have reasons or evidence outside the Bible for believing the Bible is preserved accurately or prophetically and historically accurate: we do. But those reasons or evidences do not give the Bible its authority, otherwise they become the kingmaking authorities. If archaeology or science proves the Bible to be true, then archaeology or science are really the gold standards of truth. But if God has spoken and providentially made sure His Word was recorded and preserved, then only God's Word can verify the Bible God's Word. "For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, (Hebrews 6:13)".

If this sounds circular, it is (though not viciously circular). All first principles or presuppositions must assume their own validity, which makes them axioms, unprovable, and assumptions.

But all reasoning starts either with God or with man. Christians are persuaded that the correct starting point is not man's intellect but God's Word. Unbelievers also engage in circular reasoning, assuming what they are trying to prove—that they have the intellectual capacity to sit in judgement of the Bible. They think they are rational because they are rational. So there's no avoiding circularity in reasoning. The question is which circle you want to be in, God's or man's.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov 1:7). Rational thought is based on a correct understanding of God and His Word.

2) Communication with Non-Believers

There is no such thing as neutrality when it comes to one’s views about the Bible, God, or Christianity. Everyone approaches the matter of God, eternity and the Bible with a set of ideas that are already set in place. Such views are called presuppositions.

Christians believe that the Bible is true, that God is the creator and sustainer of all things, and that the highest duty of man is to love God. Christians know this because God has convinced them that such is the case. Non-Christians reject the Christian view and replace it with other ideas.

UNBELIEVING THOUGHT	CHRISTIAN THOUGHT
Vain in their imaginations Their foolish heart was darkened Enemies of God in their minds, haters of God “What is truth?” (Pilate) Suppress the truth in unrighteousness Refuse to come to the light lest their deeds should be exposed Defiled, seared conscience Blinded by the god of this world The message of the cross as foolishness The gospel has the stench of death	Every thought captive to the obedience of Christ The light of the knowledge of the glory of God Love God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. “Thy Word is truth” (Jesus) Received the Word as the word of God Come to the light to show their deeds are done in God Cleansed consciences Eyes have been opened The message of the cross as the power of God The gospel is the aroma of life

How can Christians and non-Christians communicate if they reject each other’s presuppositions? That is, if Christians believe the Bible and non-Christians reject the Bible, how can a Christian convince a non-Christian that he needs to be saved?

3) The Danger of “Neutrality”

Some suggest that in defending and propagating the Gospel, believers should take more of a neutral attitude. That is, Christians should encourage unbelievers to take an honest, impartial look at the Bible and Christianity and judge it for themselves. People should not assume anything; they should simply look at the Bible like any other book—honestly and impartially. If the Bible seems to make reasonable sense, if it holds up to critical investigation, then it is acceptable. If not, then disregard it.

The problem with such an approach, as noted above, is that everyone starts with some presuppositions. Those who desire an impartial investigation of the Bible assume that they are qualified to engage in such an investigation. They presuppose that their own intellect is sufficient to judge whether the content of the Bible is reasonable. In fact, the Bible itself claims that the principles contained in it will not make sense to non-believers. The wisdom of God is foolishness to men (1 Cor 1:18f). Hence, from a non-believing, “neutral” point of view, the Bible will never be acceptable. It makes no sense, therefore, to encourage unbelievers to “impartially” judge the Bible.

Imagining that there is a shared “neutral” space of rational objectivity between the believer and the unbeliever does several things:

- 1) It denies what the Bible says about sin having corrupted man’s reason.
- 2) It flatters the unbeliever into thinking his autonomous reason may sit in judgement upon the Bible and God’s existence.
- 3) It deceives him into thinking that if he dismisses your evidences or reasons, that he can lawfully dismiss Christianity and God’s demands.