

Evangelism and Apologetics

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The very reason why Christians are put in the position of giving a reasoned account of the hope that is in them is that not all men have faith. Because there is a world to be evangelized (men who are unconverted), there is the need for the believer to defend his faith: Evangelism naturally brings one into apologetics. This indicates that apologetics is no mere matter of "intellectual jousting"; it is a serious matter of life and death - *eternal* life and death. The apologist who fails to take account of the evangelistic nature of his argumentation is both cruel and proud. Cruel because he overlooks the deepest need of his opponent and proud because he is more concerned to demonstrate that *he* is no academic fool than to show how all glory belongs to the gracious God of all truth. Evangelism reminds us of who we are (sinners saved by grace) and what our opponents need (conversion of heart, not simply modified propositions). I believe, therefore, that the evangelistic nature of apologetics shows us the need to follow a *presuppositional* defense of the faith. In contrast to this approach stand the many systems of neutral autonomous argumentation.

Sometimes the demand to assume a neutral stance, a noncommittal attitude toward the truthfulness of Scripture, is heard in the area of Christian scholarship (whether it be the field of history, science, literature, philosophy, or whatever). Teachers, researchers, and writers are often led to think that honesty demands for them to put aside all distinctly Christian commitments when they study in an area which is not directly related to matters of Sunday worship. They reason that since truth is truth wherever it may be found, one should be able to search for truth under the guidance of the acclaimed thinkers in the field, even if they are secular in their outlook. "Is it really necessary to hold to the teachings of the Bible if you are to understand properly the War of 1812, the chemical composition of water, the plays of Shakespeare, or the rules of logic?" Such is their rhetorical question. Hereby the demand for neutrality arises in the realm of apologetics (defense of the faith). We are told by some apologists that they would lose all hearing with the unbelieving world if they were to approach the question of Scripture's truthfulness with a preconceived answer to the question. We must be willing, according to this outlook, to approach the debate with unbelievers with a common attitude of neutrality - a "nobody knows as yet" attitude. We must assume as little as possible at the outset, we are told; and this means that we cannot assume any Christian premises or teachings of the Bible. Thus the Christian is called upon to surrender his distinctive religious beliefs, to temporarily "put them on the shelf," to take a neutral attitude in his thinking. Satan would love this to happen. More than anything else, this would prevent the conquest of the world to belief in Jesus Christ as Lord.

More than anything else, this would make professing Christians impotent in their witness, ineffective in their evangelism, and powerless in their apologetic.

The apologetical *neutralist* should reflect upon the nature of evangelism; such reflection demonstrates that (at least) in the following seven ways evangelism requires a *presuppositional* apologetic.

In attempting to bear glad tidings to the unbelieving world, the neutralist is robbed of his treasure

Contrary to neutrality's demand, God's word demands unreserved allegiance to God and his truth in all our thought and scholarly endeavors. It does so for a good reason.

Paul infallibly declares in Colossians 2:3-8 that "*All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in Christ.*" Note he says *all* wisdom and knowledge is deposited in the person of Christ - whether it be about the War of 1812, water's chemical composition, the literature of Shakespeare, or the laws of logic! Every academic pursuit and every thought must be related to Jesus Christ, for Jesus is the way, *the truth*, and the life (John 14:6). To avoid Christ in your thought at any point, then, is to be misled, untruthful, and spiritually dead.

To put aside your Christian commitments when it comes to defending the faith is willfully to steer away from the *only* path to wisdom and truth found *in Christ*. It is not the end or outcome of knowledge to fear the Lord; it is the *beginning* of knowledge to reverence Him (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). Paul draws to our attention the impossibility of neutrality "in order that no one delude you with crafty speech." Instead we must, as Paul exhorts, be steadfast, confirmed, rooted, and established in the faith as we were taught (v. 7). One must be presuppositionally committed to Christ in the world of thought (rather than neutral) and firmly tied down to the faith which he has been taught, or else the persuasive argumentation of secular thought will delude him. Hence the Christian is obligated to presuppose the word of Christ in every area of knowledge; the alternative is delusion. In verse 8 of Colossians 2, Paul says, "*Beware lest any man rob you by means of philosophy and vain deceit.*" By attempting to be neutral in your thought you are a prime target for being *robbed* - robbed by "*vain philosophy*" of "*all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*" which are deposited in Christ alone (v. 3). The unbeliever's darkened mind is an expression of his need to be evangelized.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 4 that to follow the methods dictated by the intellectual outlook of those who are outside of a saving relationship to God is to have a *vain* mind and *darkened*

understanding (vv. 17-18). Neutralist thinking, then, is characterized by intellectual futility and ignorance. In God's light, we are able to see light (cf. Ps. 36:9). To turn away from intellectual dependence upon the light of God, the truth about and from God, is to turn away from knowledge to the darkness of ignorance. Thus, if a Christian wishes to begin his scholarly endeavors from a position of neutrality he would, in actuality, be willing to begin his thinking in the dark. He would not allow God's word to be a light unto his path (cf. Ps. 119:105). To walk on in neutrality, he would be stumbling along in *darkness*. God is certainly not honored by such thought as he should be, and consequently God makes such reasoning *vain* (Rom. 1:21b). Neutrality amounts to vanity in God's sight.

That "philosophy" which does not find its starting point and direction in Christ is further described by Paul in Colossians 2:8. Paul is not against the "love of wisdom" (i.e., "philosophy" from the Greek) *per se*. Philosophy is fine as long as one properly finds *genuine wisdom* - which means, for Paul, finding it in *Christ* (Col. 2:3). However, there is a kind of "philosophy" which does not begin with the truth of God, the teaching of Christ. Instead this philosophy takes its direction and finds its origin in the accepted principles of the world's intellectuals - in the traditions of men. Such philosophy as this is the subject of Paul's disapprobation in Colossians 2:8. It is instructive for us, especially if we are prone to accept the demands of neutrality in our thinking, to investigate his characterizations of that kind of philosophy.

Paul says that it is "vain deception." What kind of thinking is it that can be characterized as "vain"? A ready answer is found by comparison and contrast in scriptural passages that speak of vanity (e.g., Deut. 32:47; Phil. 2:16; Acts 4:25; 1 Cor. 3:20; 1 Tim. 1:6; 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:15-18; Titus 1:9-10). Vain thinking is that which is not in accord with God's word. A similar study will demonstrate that "deceptive" thinking is thought which is in opposition to God's word (cf. Heb. 3:12-15; Eph. 4:22; 2 Thess. 2:10-12; 2 Pet. 2:13). The "vain deception" against which Paul warns, then, is philosophy which operates apart from, and against, the truth of Christ. Note the injunction of Ephesians 5:6, "Let no man *deceive* you with *vain* words." In Colossians 2:8 we are told to take care lest we be robbed through "vain deceit." Paul further characterizes this kind of philosophy as "according to the tradition of men, after the fundamental principles of the world." That is, this philosophy sets aside God's word and makes it void (cf. Mark 7:8-13), and it does so by beginning with the *elements of learning* dictated by the world (i.e., the precepts of men; cf. Col. 2:20, 22). The philosophy which Paul spurns is that reasoning which follows the *presuppositions* (the elementary assumptions) of the world, and thereby is "not according to Christ."

The neutralist overlooks that antithesis between the Christian and non-Christian which explains why the believer is in a position to aid the unbeliever

In Ephesians 4:17-18, Paul commands the followers of Christ that they "*no longer walk as the Gentiles also walk, in the vanity of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, alienated*

from the life of God because of the ignorance in them, because of the hardening of their heart." Christian believers must not walk, must not behave or live, in a way which imitates the behavior of those who are unredeemed; specifically, Paul forbids the Christian from imitating the unbeliever's *vanity of mind*. Christians must refuse to think or reason according to a worldly mind-set or outlook. The culpable agnosticism of the world's intellectuals must not be reproduced in Christians as alleged neutrality; this outlook, this approach to truth, this intellectual method evidences a darkened understanding and hardened heart. It refuses to bow to the Lordship of Jesus Christ over every area of life, including scholarship and the world of thought. Every man, whether an antagonist or an apologist for the Gospel, will distinguish himself and his thinking *either* by contrast to the world *or* by contrast to God's word. The contrast, the antithesis, the choice is clear: either be set apart by God's truthful word or be alienated from the life of God. Either have *"the mind of Christ"* (1 Cor. 2:16) or the *"vain mind of the Gentiles"* (Eph. 4:17). Either bring *"every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"* (2 Cor. 10:5) or continue as *"enemies in your mind"* (Col. 1:21).

Those who follow the intellectual principle of neutrality and the epistemological method of unbelieving scholarship do not honor the sovereign Lordship of God as they should; as a result, their reasoning is made vain (Rom. 1:21). In Ephesians 4, as we have seen, Paul prohibits the Christian from following this vain mind-set. Paul goes on to teach that the believer's thinking is diametrically contrary to the ignorant and darkened thinking of the Gentiles. *"But you did not learn Christ after this manner!"* (v. 20). While the Gentiles are ignorant, *"the truth is in Jesus"* (v. 21). Unlike the Gentiles who are alienated from the life of God, the Christian has put away the old man and has been *"renewed in the spirit of your mind"* (vv. 22-23). This *"new man"* is distinctive in virtue of the *"holiness of truth"* (v. 24). The Christian is completely different from the world when it comes to intellect and scholarship; he does not follow the neutral methods of unbelief, but by God's grace he has new commitments, new presuppositions, in his thinking.

Attempting to be neutral in one's intellectual endeavors (whether research, argumentation, reasoning, or teaching) is tantamount to striving to erase the antithesis between the Christian and the unbeliever. Christ declared that the former was set apart from the latter by the truth of God's word (John 17:17). Those who wish to gain dignity in the eyes of the world's intellectuals by wearing the badge of "neutrality" only do so at the expense of refusing to be *set apart*, by God's truth. In the intellectual realm they are absorbed into the world so that no one could tell the difference between their thinking and assumptions and apostate thinking and assumptions. The line between believer and unbeliever is obscured.

No such compromise is even possible. *"No man is able to serve two lords"* (Matt. 6:24). *"Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself, an enemy of God"* (James 4:4).

The nature of conversion is not continued neutrality and autonomy, but faith and submission to the Lordship of Christ

When one becomes a Christian, his faith has not been generated by the thought patterns of worldly wisdom. The world in its wisdom knows not God (1 Cor. 1:21) but considers the word of the cross to be foolish (1 Cor. 1:18, 21b). If one keeps the perspective of the world, then, he shall never see the wisdom of God for what it really is; thereby he will never be "in Christ Jesus" who is made unto believers "wisdom from God" (1 Cor. 1:30). Hence *faith*, rather than self-sufficient sight, makes you a Christian, and this trust is directed toward Christ, not your own intellect. This is to say that the way you receive Christ is to turn away from the wisdom of men (the perspective of secular thought with its presuppositions) and gain, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:12-16). When one becomes a Christian, his faith stands not in the wisdom of men but in the powerful demonstration of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:4-5).

Moreover, what the Holy Spirit causes all believers to say is "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12:3). Jesus was crucified, resurrected, and ascended in order that he might be confessed as Lord (cf. Rom. 14:9; Phil. 2:11). Thus Paul can summarize that message which must be confessed if we are to be saved as "Jesus is Lord" (Rom. 10:9). To become a Christian one submits to the Lordship of Christ; he renounces autonomy and comes under the authority of God's Son. The One whom Paul says we receive, according to Colossians 2:6, is Christ Jesus *the Lord*. As Lord over the believer, Christ requires that the Christian love him with every faculty he possesses (including his mind, Matt. 22:37); every *thought* must be brought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

Therefore, the evangelistic apologist must come and reason as a new man if he is to direct the unbeliever; his argumentation must be consistent with the end toward which he aims

We note that the unqualified precondition of genuine Christian scholarship is that the believer (along with all his thinking) be "rooted in Christ" (Col. 2:7). Paul commands us to be rooted in Christ and to shun the presuppositions of secularism. In verse 6 of Colossians 2, he explains very simply how we should go about having our lives (including our scholarly endeavors) grounded in Christ and thereby insuring that our reasoning is guided by Christian presuppositions. He says, "As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk in Him"; that is, walk in Christ *In the same way that you received him*. If you do this, you will be "established in your faith even as you were taught." How then did you become a Christian? After the same fashion you should grow and mature in your Christian walk. Above, we saw that our walk does not honor the thought patterns of worldly wisdom but submits to the epistemic Lordship of Christ (i.e., his authority in the area of thought and knowledge). In this manner a person comes to faith, and in this manner the believer must continue to live and carry out his calling - even when he is concerned with scholarship, apologetics, or schooling.

Therefore, the new man, the believer with a renewed mind that has been taught by Christ, is no more to walk in the intellectual vanity and darkness which characterizes the unbelieving world (read Eph. 4:17-21). The Christian has new commitments, new presuppositions, a new Lord, a new direction, and goal - he is a *new* man; and that newness is expressed in his thinking and scholarship, for (as in all other areas) *Christ* must have the *preeminence* in the realm of apologetics and evangelism (Col. 1:18b).

If the evangelist is to be compelling in his witness he must stand on a firm foundation of knowledge

God tells us to apply our hearts unto His knowledge if we are to know the certainty of the words of truth (Prov. 22:17-21). It is characteristic of philosophers today that they either deny that there is absolute truth or they deny that one can be certain of knowing the truth: it is either not there, or it is unreachable. However, what God has written to us (i.e., Scripture) can "make you know the certainty of the words of truth" (vv. 20-21). The truth is accessible! However, in order to firmly grasp it one must heed the injunction of verse 17b: "apply your mind to my knowledge." God's knowledge is primary, and whatever man is to know can only be based upon a reception of what God has originally and ultimately known. Man must think God's thoughts after Him, for "in thy light shall we see light" (Ps. 36:9).

David's testimony was that "The Lord my God illumines my darkness" (Ps. 18:28). Into the darkness of man's ignorance, the ignorance which results from attempted self-sufficiency, come the words of God, bringing light and understanding (Ps. 119:130). Thus Augustine correctly said, "I believe *in order* to understand." Understanding and knowledge of the truth are the promised results when man makes God's word (reflecting God's primary knowledge) his presuppositional starting point for all thinking. "Attend unto my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding in order that you may preserve discretion and in order that your lips may keep knowledge" (Prov. 5:1-2).

The neutralist forgets the gracious nature of his salvation

To make God's word your presupposition, your standard, your instructor and guide, however, calls for renouncing intellectual self-sufficiency - the attitude that you are autonomous, able to attain unto genuine knowledge independent of God's direction and standards. The man who claims (or pursues) neutrality in his thought does not recognize his complete dependence upon the God of all knowledge for whatever he has come to understand about the world. Such men give the impression (often) that they are Christians only because they, as superior intellects, have figured out or verified (to a large or significant degree) the teachings of Scripture. Instead of beginning with God's sure word as foundational to their studies, they would have us to think that

they begin with intellectual self-sufficiency and (using this as their starting-point) work up to a "rational" acceptance of Scripture. While Christians may fall into an autonomous spirit while following their scholarly endeavors, still this attitude is not consistent with Christian profession and character. "The *beginning* of knowledge is the fear of Jehovah" (Prov. 1:7). All knowledge begins with God, and thus we who wish to have knowledge must presuppose God's word and renounce intellectual autonomy. "Talk no more proudly: let not arrogance come from your mouth, for Jehovah is a God of knowledge" (1 Sam. 2:3).

Jehovah is the one who teaches man knowledge (Ps. 94:10). So *whatever* we have, even the knowledge which we have about the world, has been given to us from God. "What do you have that you have not received?" (1 Cor. 4:7). Why then would men pride themselves in intellectual self-sufficiency? "According as it stands written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the *Lord*" (1 Cor. 1:31). Humble submission to God's word must precede man's every intellectual pursuit.

Apologetics is evangelistic in nature. The apologist deals with people who have darkened minds, running from the light of God, refusing to submit to the Lord. The apologist must not demonstrate the same mind-set by striving for a neutrality which in effect puts him in the same quagmire. He must aim for the conversion of the unbelieving antagonist, and thus he must discourage autonomy and encourage submissive faith. The apologist must evidence, even in his method of argumentation, that he is a new man in Christ; he uses presuppositions which are at variance with the world. He makes the word of God his starting point, knowing that it alone gives him the assured knowledge which the unbeliever cannot have while in rebellion against Christ. The non-Christian's thinking has no firm foundation, but the Christian declares the authoritative word from God. If he did not, he could not evangelize at all: he could only pool his ignorance and speculation with the unbeliever. In doing so the Christian would be robbed of all the treasure of wisdom and knowledge which is deposited in Christ alone. Besides this, the apologist who attempts to show his intellectual self-sufficiency by moving to a position of neutrality in order that he might "prove" certain isolated truths in the Christian system forgets that grace alone has made him the Christian that he is; he should, instead, continue to think and behave in the same manner in which he received Christ (by faith, submitting to the Lordship of Christ).

Therefore, in light of the character of evangelism, the nature of the unbeliever, the nature of the regenerated apologist, the nature of conversion, the nature of genuine knowledge and salvation, the Christian apologist ought to use a presuppositional approach in his defense of the faith. The evangelistic character of apologetics demands nothing less "But *set apart Christ as lord in your hearts*, always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and respect," (1 Pet. 3:15); "we do not war according to the flesh, for *the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh*, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses, destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the

knowledge of God - we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4-5).