

Point of Contact

I. Embrace antithesis, a true-versus-false tension in your evangelism

Students of Christian apologetics often have a ‘eureka-type’ moment when they realize for the first time that either God or man is the starting point for all knowledge. These two starting points are mutually exclusive. Either divine revelation or autonomous human reason must reign as the final authority—there can be no co-regency! The two sit in irreconcilable opposition to one another as authoritative starting points. When it comes to absolute truth, one is light—the other darkness. ***We must know the condition of fallen man’s intellect—he is a studious truth suppressor. How should this inform our apologetics and evangelism?***

Because this is God’s world—the world works in a God’s way. Who God is, and what He has said, infallibly determines what is real, what is true, what is right, and what is wrong. Everywhere the unbeliever turns he is confronted with God’s created order. The non-believer attempts to explain away God’s order but cannot do so successfully. Because this is God’s world, not the world of the unbeliever’s imaginings, the unbeliever’s system for interpreting life does not correspond to reality.¹ Thus, Christian worldview is totally opposed to all thought forms/ideas which begin with self and which assume that man’s reason can function independently of God (**Eph 4:17-18**).

In our gospel outreach we maintain that it is God’s character which determines what you are (a creature made in His image), why you are here, what is required of you, and where you are going. God’s self-revelation is the only reliable starting point for all knowledge. If one’s starting point is human reason apart from divine revelation, it is rebellion against God. To place reason ahead of God’s revelation is to put one’s self in a position to not know truth (**Prov 1:7**).²

The Christian apologist may go forth with the confidence that the only way to make sense of God, of the world, or of self is by means of Christian worldview.

Christian worldview forms a framework from which to view reality and make sense of the world. Biblical worldview is our starting point in evangelism; only the biblical worldview lays the foundational scheme for all thought—providing a fixed point of reference from which Christ, the living Word and Truth incarnate, is inseparable.³

A. How do we know what we know? Epistemology is central to apologetics

Christianity’s truth claims cannot be successfully accommodated to erroneous worldviews. There are no sufficient *contact points*. Instead what is needed is a change

in a person's whole frame of reference, or worldview. This is what worldview evangelism labors to achieve. Effective evangelism today increasingly involves a worldview clash—a fundamental clash in methods of knowing.⁴

Worldview evangelism seeks to bring a person's method of knowing to the surface. Beneath every truth claim resides one's method of knowing. In the disciplines of philosophy and theology, the term for method of knowing is **epistemology**. Every individual anchors his or her professed knowledge upon some epistemology (some authoritative source of knowing, 'experts'). One of the strategies in worldview evangelism is to bring a person's particular epistemology in order to reveal his or her innate hostility to the Creator and His claims. For the Christian, epistemology is grounded in the infallible Word of Christ—the Bible. Christ has absolute authority in every area of knowledge. His lordship over all encompasses epistemology.

In our evangelistic encounters we must make sure that our conversations with unbelievers go beyond a debate over the meaning of facts. The reason is that we will not dislodge the unbeliever's erroneous view of himself, of God, and of creation if we merely appeal to the meaning of certain facts and evidences (such as archaeology, textual criticism, fulfilled prophecy, or morality).⁵ Something more is needed. The debate must go deeper—it must reach a person's epistemology.

Only by confronting the unbeliever's faulty view of God and himself will genuine conviction take place. We haven't really confronted the sinner's unbelief until we have taken him on at the point where he judges God and His infallible Word. When that takes place, the sinner is confronted with the inescapable truth of God, and be brought face to face with the Creator's claims upon him (**Rom 1:18-23**).⁶

According to Romans 1:22, it is the unbeliever's epistemology (suppression of the knowledge of God and speculation) which makes him a fool. Concerning the contrast in epistemologies, believer and unbeliever stand on opposite sides of a bottomless chasm. On the biblical side, the Word of Christ is our authoritative epistemology. On the unbeliever's side, autonomous self is the trusted epistemology. A person's answers are coming either from the Word of God or they are coming from self. There can be no meaningful contact between the two sides without a clash between these two epistemologies (Arizona's Grand Canyon in Arizona is and wide).

B. Our apologetic methodology creates a clash between methods of knowing

The Apostle Paul instigated a clash between epistemologies when he addressed his Gentile hearers on Mars Hill. Paul began with biblical worldview. He

started with the Creator and the Creator's relationship to the creation. The first thing Paul does when evangelizing the biblically illiterate is to lay a foundation or framework for the gospel. In his sermon in **Acts 17:22-31** the Apostle lays the foundation stones of Christian worldview. In so doing, he sets up a collision between the pantheistic Greek worldview and the theism of biblical worldview. Paul declares to his hearers that God is not who they imagine Him to be. He is not a local deity served by human hands. He is Creator, Owner, Ruler, and Upholder of all that He has made.

In his address to the Athenians, Paul models the best way to establish God's authority and absolute claims upon His creatures—it is by means of the doctrine of God as Creator. This was Paul's approach: he was establishing biblical theism (the doctrine of God). He was dealing with people unfamiliar with the Old Testament. The Apostle began his message with the doctrine of God and the Creator's relation to His creation. Only then did he proceed to the gospel itself. We also are seeking to reach a culture that is increasingly biblically illiterate. We are striving to reach a culture that has lost its grasp of God as Creator, Upholder, Law-giver, Ruler, and Judge. Without this foundational knowledge of God, there is no framework or context for the gospel.

Satan's lie in Eden was a lie about God. It was a tacit rejection of the truth that all things are *by Him and for Him* (**Rom 11:36**). By not acknowledging the Creator-creature distinction, are entering into the primal sin of our first parents. This is why the battle for origins is of vital importance—it is worth the fight. But it is a battle not won *primarily* by an appeal to specific facts and data. The reason is that at the bottom of all debate is ***one's epistemology and one's claim to know***. The Christian apologist is ever aware that at the bottom of all debate over worldviews is one's epistemology.

Here was my approach when talking with my German friends on the Lufthansa flight. I asked them questions which brought the core assumptions of their worldview to the surface so that those assumptions could be set in stark contrast with the authoritative claims of Scripture. I posed questions such ***as "How does your worldview account for the existence of science, conscience, morality, objective evil, love, death, suffering, and substantive hope?"*** I broke this line of questioning into queries spaced out over the conversation. What proved to be almost shocking to them was that the Bible proclaimed the answers to these questions—answers which perfectly cohered with reality. Having allowed them to share their worldview and its inability to account for reality I was able to gain permission to share the biblical worldview with them including the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Part of our task in worldview evangelism is to make people aware of the erroneous philosophies that they have assimilated. We need to remember that we

are dealing with folks who have made a heart commitment to core assumptions that are unproven and unexamined. We employ questions which are designed to bring a person's worldview to the surface so that they may be discussed.

Once a person owns his worldview (which he may recognize for the first time as he hears it from his own lips) there is a prime opportunity to present the gospel as the *exact opposite of what he believes*. It is this contrast between truth and error that is useful in bringing conviction by confronting the sinner with the claims of the Creator.

C. Christian worldview is the only 'key' that fits the lock of human experience

We already know from Scripture that the sinner's professed belief does not match his actual experience. Only in Christian worldview does the data match experience. ***This is the exciting thing about bringing biblical worldview into evangelism—you see correspondence going on between the Word of God and the unbeliever's inescapable sense of deity (i.e. that God exists).*** The truth of the Bible "resonates" with the unbeliever's actual experience. The Word of God finds him out—discovers "where he lives" in his mind—exposing his hiding places (**Jn 3:19-21**).

WITNESSING EXPERIENCE: On a flight to the mid-west I met Danny. He was a handsome football player and recent graduate from a small private college in Iowa. He mentioned that his major had been ecology. I asked Danny if he were a thorough going evolutionist. He said that he was and that he sought to be consistent, interpreting all of life by means of evolutionary naturalism.

My next comment startled him. "Danny, I don't think you really believe that evolution explains all of life." With a surprised look he said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I don't think you believe that your thoughts are merely mental mutations—all of them determined by the properties of matter and without true significance. And that your thoughts are only there to get your genes into the next generation." I added, "Isn't it true that when you have a serious conversation with your girlfriend that you believe that your ideas, opinions, and convictions have lasting significance—that they matter in life?"

Danny immediately conceded the point. He agreed that chance and chaos cannot produce people, logic, morals, and meaning. He thanked me for opening up the topic of origins and offered the suggestion that much of his thinking was incomplete and made up of unexamined assumptions.

After my encounter with Danny, I reflected on the fact that we live in a culture that seems dead set upon thinking up new reasons why the gospel cannot be true.

And, to make matters worse, these fallacious ideas about the gospel are then woven into popular culture, education, and entertainment.

I was reminded after my conversation with Danny that many Christians would like to share their faith but find it daunting to do so. The apparent “implausibility” of the gospel keeps the majority of believers mute in their witness. This is why I am convinced that worldview evangelism can give Christians the equipping they need—by providing a way to internally critique the unbeliever’s worldview. Just to know that the unbeliever cannot possibly live out his presuppositions is a source of confidence in our witness. I like to remind my evangelism students that the guilt in the unbeliever’s conscience is just as real as the splinter in his hand.⁷

In our witness, we may proceed with the confidence that the Christian worldview answers every ultimate question. (Core questions/ultimate questions are: *where did we come from? why are we here? what is a human? is God knowable? why is there death and suffering? what happens after death? what is man’s destiny? etc.*).

We use a certain apologetic methodology in our witness. We raise and answer ultimate questions. When Christ came to earth, He answered every ultimate question! Christ is my philosophy of origins, purpose, and destiny (**Col 2:8**).

WITNESSING EXPERIENCE: On President’s Day I took my family to see the Ronald Reagan Library. A number of characters dressed as America’s founding fathers were giving speeches throughout the library grounds. I had my art supplies with me and began to sketch “George Washington.” Members of the press were busy interviewing characters and library guests. One reporter asked if I would answer her questions about free speech. After doing so, I asked if her views on free speech would allow me to make a statement. She agreed. My comment was as follows: “God’s authoritative mouthpiece is the Lord Jesus Christ. He has definitively told us what is true, what is real, what is right and wrong. If we refuse to listen to Him, we sentence ourselves to drift on a shore-less sea of relativism.” Her response amazed me. She said it was one of the most profound things she had ever heard. She then asked if I would sign a release for the video she had just recorded. I share this only to reiterate that most of the people I meet are grateful for a clear and compelling presentation of the gospel.

The assumption of human autonomy drives every erroneous worldview. Anti-theistic speculation is by no means a benign action; it draws down the wrath of God. Mental idolatry entertains false conceptions of God (**Rom 1:18**). Romans one tells us why the world is filled with erroneous worldviews. It is because the unbeliever wants to snuff out the light he has been given. He loves his imagined independence from God so much that he prefers absurdity over the knowledge of God. Unbelievers reject

the gospel not due to rational thought but under the influence of non-rational factors. The ultimate commitments of their hearts to self and sin find expression in their suppression of the knowledge of God.

Unbelievers choose worldviews made up of irrational presuppositions—but we must know why. Fallen man subscribes to erroneous worldviews in an attempt to maintain his imagined independence from God. He has made a core commitment to a lie in order to keep his distance from God—to evade God’s claims upon him.

D. There are certain attributes of God known to every human being

The Christian apologist can go forth with the confidence that every unbeliever already knows certain inescapable things about God (He is Creator, He is good, He will judge all men). Christians have the confidence from Scripture that every unbeliever lives in an inescapable “sea of divine revelation.” According to Psalm 19, every man is surrounded by the “sermons” God has placed within the wonders of creation. Every natural man “short-circuits” these sermons placed in the creation, demonstrating that he is a studious suppressor of the truth of God.

We may therefore proceed in our evangelistic efforts with the biblical confidence that every natural man possesses the above *inescapable* ‘sense of deity’. And we conduct our evangelistic efforts with the assurance that the Word of God perfectly corresponds with the moral truth which God has written on the conscience of every man. They are without excuse because God made the knowledge of Himself evident *to them* and *in them* (**Rom 1:19-20**).

When an unbeliever hears the Word of God, a work of correspondence takes place. The Word of God meets him at the point of his suppression. It shows the law of God written in his heart. It shines light on his defiled conscience. The voice of conscience says, “I know that what I am hearing is true.” When the natural man hears the Word of God he is confronted with the Creator he already knows.

II. Be certain your approach uses the biblical point of contact

The point of contact of God and His truth is at the point of man’s rebellion.

A. The point of contact may be broken down further:

- It is God’s claims upon His creatures (what He requires; what we owe Him).

- It is man's sinful rebellion against God's laws (man's predicament as guilty).
- It is the image of God (it is man's intellectual war on the *image of God*—man's denial that he bears the image of his Creator).
- It is man's inescapable sense of deity (**Rom 1:18-23**—the fact that all men know God through the creation).

God makes Himself known by first setting forth the man's predicament. The unbeliever's suppression of the knowledge of God, his habitual breaking of God's law, his just condemnation, and his legal guilt—must be stated. Men are not ready for the good news of the gospel until their consciences have been “educated” concerning the seriousness of *God's claims* upon them. This is one of the most difficult tasks to accomplish in a postmodern culture. When opening up the sinner's predicament, I not only seek to do so with surgical precision, but also with the conviction that I am speaking with a person in dire need of Christ's sovereign mercy.

The sinner opposes himself when he argues as if he has a rational case. Here's where the strength of the Christian worldview comes in—take the unbeliever back to his worldview and to his presuppositional starting point.⁸ At that juncture, his system falls apart. In order for his existence to be meaningful, it cannot be grounded upon matter and motion, chaos and chance, speculation, and absurdity. I explain to the unbeliever that his desire for a life of purpose is only possible if he has God who is the source of all purpose (if plotline of history is about God, it can't be about you).

B. Scripture exposes the unbeliever's faulty method of evaluating God's truth

Because men are ignorant of God due to sin, the point of contact cannot be in human reason or aspirations.⁹ A biblical method of apologetics will have a biblical starting point—the sinner's predicament. ***The Bible establishes a point of contact that exposes the sinner's faulty epistemology (which is part of his predicament).*** The unbeliever's epistemology (or method of knowing) operates upon the assumption that he is autonomous and not accountable to God. This core commitment to autonomous self drives the unbeliever's studious suppression of God's truth. In essence, the unbeliever's worldview is constructed so as to invalidate God's claims upon him.

The unbeliever's method of knowing is guided by his ethical hostility to God. As Scripture says, “. . . The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so” (**Rom 8:7**).

C. We cannot allow the natural man's assumption of himself as ultimate reference point to remain unchallenged

There must be a "head on collision" between the Creator's claims and the false assumptions of the natural man. If we do not challenge his assumption that he can arrive at truth independently of God, he will interpret Christianity in naturalistic terms (myth, human tradition, spiritual aspiration, etc.).¹⁰ The concepts of *faith*, *sin*, *salvation*, and *Jesus* will all be heard through the distorting filter of his worldview.

We must labor to show the unbeliever that as long as he clings to his imagined autonomy, he cancels out the ability to know the truth. The unbeliever's frame of reference must be overturned. This can be done by taking the unbeliever to what he already knows but seeks to suppress. He already knows that God is Creator, is good, and will judge him someday. He already knows that the creation reveals the attributes of God. And he already knows that man is created in the image of God.

Next I show the unbeliever that his assumptions are "on trial" in God's court. I want the non-believer to see his preference for a worldview that lets him determine reality instead of God. All the while I keep in mind that none of my answers will satisfy him until he repents and gives up his rebellion.

At this point I often return to variations of my four worldview questions: ***For example, "Are morals really evolving?" "Where do morals come from?" "How can your limited perspective be authoritative if you cannot answer even one ultimate question with certainty?"*** By emphasizing the clash in worldviews, I am in effect "smashing" the distorting filter of false worldview and bringing the person face to face with his Creator's claims upon him. A clash is essential if he is to stand red-handed before his Maker, then I can begin to show him his need of the Savior.

III. Because the faithful Christian apologist KNOWS Scripture, he knows the ethical condition of the unbeliever's mind.

Romans 1:18-23 is the record of the universal corruption of human reason and Romans one stresses that the sinner's real problem is not intellectual, but moral. As an enemy of God, he denies his need of divine revelation to understand the world and man's place in it. A biblical apologetic emphasizes the ***antithesis*** that exists between the mind of the believer and unbeliever.¹¹

The antithesis is not merely one group of propositions contrary to another; it is about the whole life of a man. It is about the conflict of the ages between the

kingdom of God and the kingdom of the wicked one. ¹² The antithesis between kingdoms centers upon the matter of the recognition of the lordship of Christ. I want the unbeliever to understand that the Word of God proclaims Christ as the truth incarnate. Christ's lordship is over all truth, all knowledge, all history, and all providence (**Col 1:15-20**). To reject Christ's lordship is to reject His interpretation of the world and to accept Satan's interpretation instead (by default) (**2 Cor 4:4**).

A. The Christian apologist is 'epistemologically self-conscious'—his biblical point of contact identifies where an unbeliever's answers originate

When presenting his apologetic argument, the Christian should begin by emphasizing that every worldview has an ultimate reference point or source of authority (either God or self). We must be able to demonstrate the *antithesis* between the believer and the unbeliever's espoused systems of thought. We press home the truth that the Word of God condemns every worldview that denies that God is the ultimate source of authority.

Christian worldview stresses that reality is based upon God's plan for His creation. I then ask the unbeliever if that makes sense to him, and I ask him to explain how his worldview differs from the Word of God. This gives me the opportunity to set forth the truth as the very opposite of what he claims to believe.

WITNESSING EXPERIENCE: While evangelizing on the campus of Cal Arts University, I met a senior named Jason who was extremely well read in philosophy. His two companions appeared to take pride in their friend's ability to articulate his philosophic beliefs. As the conversation unfolded Jason began to issue challenges to the truth claims I was presenting. Revealing his postmodern perspective Jason commented, "Why are you killing the conversation by making absolutist statements?" I back-pedaled for the moment and continued to affirm Christian truth.

Jason's next move, to the delight of his friends, was to mention that the evangelical college students he had dated were biblically illiterate. Jason had made two points. Truth is relative and Christians are shallow. I stayed off Jason's "turf" and took the conversation back to the Word of God. "Jason, has anyone ever explained to you what the Word of God says about your worldview?" His answer "No, they haven't" seemed both pleasant and curious.

I opened to **Romans 1:1-23** and read the text with an explanation. Jason cocked his head slightly as he heard from Scripture that he was a truth suppressor. As I explained the text to him his interest level soared. An appointment was calling him

away, but it was clear that this glib philosopher was at a loss for words. I knew why. He had just heard his Creator's "voice" in the Word of God. He had been "apprehended" in the hiding place of his erroneous worldview.

B. The apologist must not "tone down" the confrontation between truth and error

By emphasizing the *antithesis*, the apologist guards against arguing with a fool on the "turf" of his worldview.¹³ When we set aside the biblical point of contact in our evangelistic encounters, it permits the natural man's view of self to stand. ***Our point of contact is man's rebellion against God's claims upon him (as a creature created in the image of God).*** We press the claims of God upon men without apology. Ask the natural man how his system differs from the Word of God. Listen to his objections, then present him the *opposite* of what he claims to believe.

WITNESSING EXPERIENCE: It can feel socially incorrect to engage in conversation which takes on the form of debate based on arguments. But the value of biblical worldview in evangelism is that it can contrast, diagnose, and expose unbiblical worldviews all by using questions to gain permission. Several years ago I met a Christian brother at Starbucks for fellowship. As soon as we arrived, we ran into two unsaved gentlemen to whom we had witnessed to in the past.

After spending an hour with each, both expressed gratitude that we had asked to examine what they believed. Rather than interpreting our questions as invasive, they saw them as genuine care. During our conversations we also expressed concern for their souls and we pointed out where their views differed from Scripture. They individually thanked us repeatedly and said how much they anticipated the next meeting. How we need to remind ourselves that it is an act of incredible love, mercy, and compassion to address the lost-ness and irrationality of the unbeliever.

The unbeliever does not have a legitimate reason why the Christian worldview is not true. The Christian apologist must reach a point in the conversation in which he challenges the sinner to take his faith out of himself and put it in God.¹⁴

The sinner may acknowledge that God is a magnificent "category" but not the very meaning and rationality of the universe. When the sinner seeks to erase the Creator-creature existence, he is attacking his Creator who is the only possible source to give meaning to existence. When training my students to share the gospel, I remind them frequently that it is not "data" that the unbeliever lacks. What is lacking is moral and intellectual repentance. ***The non-believer has chosen an "absurdity perspective"***

view of life in order to hold fast to imagined autonomy. I don't want my students to be surprised to find that the unbeliever does not want the gospel to make sense.

C. The apologist is to appeal to the sense of deity that is in the very depth of the sinner's consciousness

Unbelievers frequently try to reduce the point of contact to a debate between personal opinions. Respond by asking, "Where are your answers coming from?" Show the unbeliever what God says about his worldview. Show him that his assumptions are on trial, not the revelation of Christ.¹⁵ Your gospel appeals must go beyond horizontal arguments in order to reach the sense of deity etched in the sinner's conscience. Then God's verdict against sin begins to do its work in the conscience.

The apologist is to appeal to the sense of deity that is in the very depth of the sinner's consciousness. The natural man is always confronting the same God who now asks him to yield obedience to Him.¹⁶ The natural man is constantly haunted by **Romans 2:14-16** which affirms that the accusations of God's law written on his heart fill the workings of his conscience.¹⁷

The things impossible with men are possible with God. Salvation is of the Lord. Only by God's Spirit can the sinner attain to a true knowledge of God and a true knowledge of himself as the *image of God*.¹⁸ ***Only regeneration can reset the human intellect to bow before God's truth revealed in Christ.***

Endnotes:

¹ Kim Riddlebarger, "Francis Schaeffer: Taking the Roof Off," (The Apologetics of Francis Schaeffer, www.monergism.com).

² James F. Stitzinger, "Apologetics and Evangelism Th 701" (Sun Valley: The Master's Seminary, 1999)

³ John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1994) 120, 121.

⁴ D. A. Carson, "The Supremacy of Christ in Postmodern Culture."

⁵ John Whitcomb, "Contemporary Apologetics" (lecture series).

⁶ James F. Stitzinger, "Apologetics and Evangelism Th 701."

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ James F. Stitzinger, *Apologetics*, pp. 58, 99, 101, 113.

⁹ William Edgar, "Two Christian Warriors: Cornelius Van Til and Francis A. Schaeffer Compared"

¹⁰ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic, Readings & Analysis* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1998), 439.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 97.

¹² John M. Frame, "Van Til on Antithesis" *WTJ*, P. 101.

¹³ James F. Stitzinger, *Apologetics*, p. 118, 126.

¹⁴ James F. Stitzinger, *Apologetics*, pp. 122, 126, 127.

¹⁵ Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, p. 83.

¹⁶ Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, p. 448.

¹⁷ James F. Stitzinger, *Apologetics*, p. 97.

¹⁸ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Some Epistemological Reflections on 1 Corinthians 2:6-16" *The Westminster Theological Journal* 57:1 (Spring 1995): 106-110.