

Circularity and Christian Apologetics

Do we prove the Bible from the Bible? By Jay Wegter

Does the Bible's 'self-attestation' constitute circular reasoning?

We begin with the premise that the circularity employed in defending Scripture is not the same kind of circularity employed by the unbeliever in defending his erroneous worldview. The unbeliever's circularity is flawed. A worldview cannot validate itself because it is made up of presuppositions (assumptions/core commitments) which are taken on faith. A worldview is like a scale that weighs things; but the scale can't weigh itself. When it comes to validating itself, there still must be a standard by which the internal weights of the scale are calibrated.

The natural man's reasoning processes may be compared to a pair of "faulty scales" (Grover Gunn, *A comparison of Apologetic Methods*, pp., 3-4). It is useful to the Christian apologist to know that the unbeliever's "scales" are not in working order! In this analogy the "scales" are analogous to one's *world view*. All information that a person encounters is *interpreted* by means of his world view. The scales are utilized to validate everything except one thing—they cannot weigh themselves! God has given to every man "weights" that are accurately stamped. They are stamped *internally* by reason of the fact that all men bear the *image of God*. Every person has an innate knowledge that he is made in the image of an almighty Creator—the law of God is written upon man's heart (Rom 2:14-15).

The God-given "weights" are also stamped *externally*. The whole creation that surrounds man gives inescapable daily evidence of the power, wisdom, and majesty of its Creator (Ps 19) (Ibid., p. 5-7). To avoid the indelible stamp that God has put upon these "weights," the natural man constructs a *fantasy view* of reality that flows from his own mind. As a consequence, the unbeliever's 'scales' do not "weigh" accurately. "Issues that should carry great weight [the Creator's absolute claims on the creature] have no weight at all on the scales of unbelief" (Ibid, p. 13).

The unbeliever cannot get an accurate reading upon his scales because he has set aside the authoritative claims of God, Christ, and Scripture. Because the apologist is armed with an understanding of the unbeliever's reasoning processes, *he will not* suggest for a moment that the unbeliever's scales are in working order (Ibid, pp. 14-15). When the Christian apologist keeps asking the question, "And why is that true?" He is actually 'drilling down' deep enough to hit core assumptions which are taken on faith. These core assumptions are commonly offered as 'proofs' of one's life view—but in reality, they are self-referential (EX. Atlas holding the world, standing on tortoises).

The circularity used in proving the Bible differs from all other kinds of circularity (Whitcomb).

It is common for Christians to be accused of circular reasoning when they seek to prove the Bible from the Bible. But is that circular reasoning in the classical sense? The Christian apologist must know why the Bible's self-attestation is not to be equated with the world's use of circular reasoning. A frequent refrain in the debate between believer and unbeliever is the plea for neutrality as 'fairness'. But is it possible to begin reasoning without an ultimate starting point? Not really. When a Christian debates a philosophic naturalist; often little is really accomplished. Facts and 'purported facts' fly about. But, in reality, little contact is made—both are arguing from their respective starting points. In a way it is like a contest between a whale and an elephant. Lots of thrashing takes place; but there is no conquest. The two beasts live in completely different realms—land and sea!

The real work of providing an internal critique of the unbeliever's worldview only takes place when the Christian ceases to debate over the meaning of certain facts; and begins to expose the unbeliever's faulty epistemology. In other words, show the unbeliever that the 'scales' of his worldview cannot weigh themselves.

The circularity employed in defending Scripture is inseparable from the Scripture's sufficiency.

If the Christian moves over to neutrality to get a hearing—he is actually taking a stand against the sufficiency of Scripture. To concede neutrality is to step onto the apostate turf of “*nobody knows for sure.*” God has given general revelation to overturn “*nobody knows for sure.*” Romans 1:18-23 teaches the ‘infallibility’ of general revelation. All men are rendered accountable by God’s general revelation (Rom 1:18-23). Chaos and chance do not write immensely sophisticated and complex codes and programs such as DNA. Nor can they be a rational source of *transcendentals* (truth, beauty, morality, love, justice, evil, uniformity in nature, unity of knowledge, etc.).

General revelation renders all men guilty; without excuse (Rom 1:20). Thus, how one treats general revelation (God’s infallible revelation in the creation) totally conditions how one treats special revelation (the inscripturated Word of God). Western culture, having abandoned God’s absolutes, utilizes the distorted lens of naturalism to interpret the facts of God’s creation. The result is futility, folly—the natural man’s ‘epistemology—*truth suppression and clinging to autonomy*—make him a fool (Rom 1:21; Eph 4:17-19).

Is human reason the ‘common ground’ we have with the unbeliever?

Reason is not the common ground upon which the believer should try to make contact with the unbeliever. Unbelievers possess an epistemic bias is to twist God’s truth for their purposes since they are truth suppressors. Granting human reason as “common ground” suggests that the unbeliever may use reason to determine whether he/she should believe in the God of the Bible or not. The Bible does not grant this right. The unbeliever is called to repent and believe the gospel. We bring the gospel to men unproven (see Acts 17:30-31). Why? The Bible is its own ultimate criterion for truth. Every philosophical system uses its own standard in proving its conclusions; otherwise it would be inconsistent. When arguing for an ultimate criterion; one must use criterion compatible with that conclusion. (Frame in Cowan, 210).

If we are utterly determined by nature (mechanistic determinism), then how would it be possible to transcend our determined state to predicate anything? (EX. Note the toad, instinct, and the ants on the I-Pad screen.) God knows all facts—the mind of God is the source of the cosmos, the source of uniformity in nature, and the source of unified knowledge. Without this foundation for rationality, one cannot escape the conclusion that man is but a cog in nature (and not the image and likeness of God).

There are necessary conditions for truth which are inseparable from absolute truth itself. These conditions MUST be argued with the ultimate truth. God, as set forth in Scripture is transcendent. Thus, we will find Him ONLY by the conditions consistent with His transcendence. Those conditions are *dependency upon His infallible self-revelation*. You can’t look for God the way you’d look for crackers in the cupboard (Greg Bahnsen, *Bahnsen vs. Stein Debate*). If you set out to map the Himalayas with a pad of paper, a flashlight, and a 12-inch ruler—you would fail on a grand scale. Why? Because the magnitude of what you are seeking to map and measure is infinitely larger than your tools and your vantage point. So also, the God of Scripture cannot be known or found by the inadequate tools of human reason and empiricism. *Is man able to set aside God as the source of human rationality and then successfully invent his own basis for rationality? Our Creator’s rationality*

is the source of our own. The necessary conditions for knowledge are in God alone—a universe based on chance and chaos can not be the source of rationality.

Ultimate intellectual criteria for truth must involve circularity.

“Although appealing to the Bible as the ultimate epistemological foundation for belief may sound simplistic and naïve to some (as well as unpersuasive) . . . this is the key to maintaining the full sufficiency and authority of Scripture. Not only does God *not* call Christians to put the authority of His Word ‘on the shelf’ while they argue for Christianity, but doing so will deny the very thing they are setting out to prove, namely, that God’s Word should be the authority over every area of thought (including apol.)” (Kruger in Vlach, “The Sufficiency of Scripture in Apol.,” *TMSJ* 12/1 Spring 2001: 70).

How does Biblical circularity differ from the world’s flawed logic?

- We presuppose the Christian Worldview anchored in Scripture’s sufficiency because of the impossibility of the contrary (*chaos* and *a big bang* cannot produce the pre-conditions of knowledge—i.e. logic, morality, correspondence between one’s mind and the world, uniformity and order in nature, and science).
- The Word of God proclaims God to be the only authoritative vantage point for all reality. God Himself structures all reality—He is the ontological reference point for all reality. Truth and reality meet eternally in the mind of God. To presuppose or assert the authority of self-attesting Scripture is inseparable from holding to the sufficiency of God’s Word.
- Human reason cannot be the final reference point for all reality (finite man cannot provide the universals necessary to bring unity to particulars). (In the schema of autonomous reason, truth and reality do not cohere with one another; nor do they have comprehensive meaningful contact.)
- The ‘circle’ scribed by the Word of God encompasses all reality and accounts for all reality. Inside the ‘circle of reality’ scribed by God’s revelation is God’s authoritative condemnation of all lying worldviews. Therefore, you can tell the unbeliever that God has something to say about his worldview! Also inside the circle of God’s revelation is God’s infallible word about angels, demons, the elect, the reprobate, history, creation, the new creation, the kingdom of light, and the kingdom of darkness (John C. Whitcomb Jr., *Contemporary Apologetics*).
- Only the Word of God perfectly correlates with human experience—only the Word of God is the ‘key’ which fits the lock of universe. General revelation and special revelation are in total agreement. This refutes the error that one worldview is as good as another.
- The Word of God is self-attesting—it is God’s self-revelation (note that Christ’s self-attestation was the basis of His authority claims during His discourses).
- God created man with the capacity to recognize God’s truth the moment he sees it. Man is without excuse because the knowledge of God has been “made evident” to all men—the doctrine of general revelation (Romans 1:18-23).
- The sinner is totally unable to make sense of himself, of God, or of this world apart from the Christian worldview. Through erroneous worldviews, sinners suppress the very worldview they need to make sense of the world.

- Christ died for the church—to give His redeemed true knowledge. He died to give us ‘the mind of Christ’ (1 Cor 2:16). Therefore, to reject the Word of Christ is to reject Him both as Savior and as ‘Interpreter of the world’.

Is presuppositional apologetics the only apologetic methodology which utilizes a presuppositional starting point?

Everyone has an ultimate starting point. “Unlike others, we who contend for the sufficiency of Scripture are up front about what our ultimate presupposition is.” Ex. Those who believe that **human reason** is the ultimate authority in all matters (*rationalism*) must assume that human reason is the ultimate authority. “The point is that when one is arguing for an ultimate criterion, whether Scripture, the Koran, human reason, sensation, or whatever, one must use criteria compatible with that conclusion. If that is circularity, then everybody is guilty of circularity” (Frame, AGG, 10). “. . . [P]resuppositions are inescapable, so the issue becomes one of their **validity or invalidity**. The presuppositionalist therefore is concerned with the task of deriving his assumptions from the Scriptures” (George Zemek in Vlach, 9).

God as prime reality is the foundation for all other questions—because the nature and character of the cosmos is determined by God.

If *prime reality* is the God of Scripture; then ethics will NOT be based on humanity’s highest aspirations; but will be grounded in the character of God as ultimate goodness. Human purpose; the meaning of life; human value, and identity will not be self-determined by any person, community, nation, or multinational group; but will be predetermined by God alone (p. 55). *Ontology precedes epistemology*.

The Logos doctrine states that God underlies the existence and determinate nature of the universe. The very principle of purpose, meaning, and rationality reside in the character of God Himself. All things existing originated in the creative and inventive mind of God and *Consequently*, when they were conceived and also “*spoken*,” received in themselves, as their essence, the quality of a “spoken word,” the character, therefore, to be understandable and intelligible (Joseph Pieper, from Sire, p. 56). Every fact in nature is a servant and ‘revelation of God’ (Ps 19), C. S. Lewis.

Because Logos made the world; it is characterized by reasonability, intelligibility, and meaningfulness. Christ connects theology and science (Heb 1:1-3). Human knowledge is possible because He who created and knows all things exhaustively is also the “light of all people” (Jn 1:4, 9). This is why we can know. Ontology—the existence of an omniscient God who creates us in His image—is the foundation for epistemology. “People want *Eros* not *Logos*” (Peter Jones).

The eternal Logos has been incarnated on earth. When Jesus opposed the religious establishment of His day; He confronted the worship of what was not God as He really is. The illusion of autonomous reason is merely the imagined autonomy of each person’s ego. The biblical priority of *Being*—God as Being—has been undergoing *replacement* in our culture with epistemology: the hermeneutics of the autonomous self.

Christ’s epistemic authority is anchored in His ontological self-identification.

Christ’s testimony concerning His mission and His message was never divorced from His claim to be the only begotten Son of God (Jn. 5:18; 10:33-36). He continually punctuated His discourses with the authoritative claim that He was from heaven. His message and arrival were not because of His own

initiative (John 3:13; 5:30). If Christ is who He says He is, then all speculation is excluded. God can only swear by Himself (Heb. 6:13). God's Word declares that faith in the self-attesting Christ of the Scriptures is the *beginning*, not the conclusion of wisdom. To reverence the Lord and fear Him is the *beginning* of knowledge (Prov 1:7; 9:10). Christ is the starting point of every academic pursuit.

What we study in every academic field is made by God and sustained by His presence (Heb 1:3). Christ joins theology and science (p. 57). By Christ's agency the world of matter was created and sustained. Modern researchers and philosophers, like the Colossian teachers of old, were preoccupied with their cosmical speculations. Christ, the Word Incarnate, brings comprehensive worldview and unity to all fields of knowledge: "How much more hearty would be the sympathy of theologians with the revelations of science and the developments of history, if they habitually connected them with the operation of the same Divine Word who is the center of all their religious aspirations, it is needless to say" (Lightfoot, *Colossians*, p.116). ***"The physical investigations of our own age from their very nature can do nothing; for, busied with the evolution of phenomena, they lie wholly outside this question [of the nature of reality], and do not even touch the fringe of the difficulty.*** [God's revelation in Christ] gives a breadth and unity to our conceptions, at once satisfying our religious needs and linking our scientific instincts with our theological beliefs" (Lightfoot, p.117).

The priority of ontology (God's self-existence) governs the Gospel's message. All four Gospels are bent on answering the question, "Who is Jesus?" Is the first matter of importance. If we understand who He is; then His teaching will be powerful and existentially true. Jesus continually anchored the authority of His words in His self-attesting identity. Because He is the Author of life; His death and resurrection will be among the most significant events in the cosmos (p. 57).

Christ's epistemic authority as the Living Word is the source of the written Word.

Christ's role as "Prophet" involves revealing to us "by His Word and His Spirit the will of God for our salvation" (W. S. C., Q. 24). "He is uniquely equipped for this office, inasmuch as all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him (Col 2:2-3). To refuse His epistemic lordship is to continue in epistemic futility. Christ repeatedly stated that He did not bear witness of Himself (Jn 8:14). His Word was NOT His own teaching" (Robert Reymond, *The Justification of Knowledge*, p.31). ***"It should be carefully noted that when the incarnate Son of God authenticated the Scriptures, He was not only authenticating His own word, but He was also doing it according to His own declared authority in keeping with the principle He affirmed in John 8:14.*** Jesus based the validity of His testimony upon an appeal to His own knowledge of Himself, unintimidated by the charge of *petitio principii* [assuming in the premise what one wishes to prove, "begging the question"]. His appeal is in accord with the divine procedure enunciated in Hebrews 6:13: "... when God made a promise . . ., since He had no one greater by whom to swear, He swore by Himself (Ibid.).

Hence one must never separate in his doctrine of Scripture the Scriptures themselves from the Christ of Scripture. It is the same self-attesting eternal Word revealing itself and speaking in and through both. Christ's Word in Scripture is essential to true knowledge; as the standard of truth (Jn 14:6), the Word of the Christ of Scripture ultimately is the test of truth (Luke 16:31). To doubt the truthfulness of Scripture is to doubt the Christ of Scripture is to be immoral, it is to operate with one's false ideal and test of knowledge (epistemology.). To fail to believe Christ and His Word, the Bible, will result only in His refusal to acknowledge the unbeliever as His own in the day of judgment (Luke 9:26). To refuse to receive His words as one's authority will result one day in one's being judged by those very words (Jn 12:48)" (Reymond, pp. 31-32).

Christ's epistemic Lordship governs our apologetic methodology. Only God's Word can penetrate to the depths of the heart. Rationalism won't go there. The arguments posed by semi-rational apologists are ineffective at entering that realm of reality in which the Word and the Spirit of God must go to convert a man. Proofs and evidences do not enter that realm. ***Our problem is that we are not really sure that the Word of God has that much power!*** We imagine that we need extra helps and props to have people really believe it is God's Word. We assume that we need semi-rationalistic argumentation with philosophically minded folks before people will take Christianity seriously (John Whitcomb, *Contemporary Apologetics*). "How can a man believe what he has not and cannot see?" ANSWER: God has built into us the capacity to recognize spiritual truth as God Himself proclaims it to them, and then demands they recognize who He is (reject and suppress the testimony of His Word and you are doomed forever. ***God does not doom people for what they cannot do.*** You are responsible because God tells you that you are capable of recognizing Him when He speaks.) (Whitcomb).

The Edenic Lie, and resultant "Eve theory of knowledge" is duplicated by every non-theistic philosophy of man.

The unbeliever avoids the subject of the source of his existence. He is opposed to God's moral authority and does not wish to admit that he is accountable to God. This refusal to retain God in his thoughts directly affects his approach to knowledge. The unbeliever seeks to answer the question of knowledge (epistemology); without addressing the question of being (ontology). He claims to know independent of God. ("If the Being of God is what, on the basis of Scripture testimony, we have found it to be, it follows that our knowledge will be true knowledge only to the extent that it corresponds to His knowledge.") (Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 33).

By believing the lie, Eve placed herself and God on the same level. Eve sought to gain *knowledge* while ignoring the question of *being*. She erased in her own mind the infinite *ontological* distance between Creator and creature – she forgot her creaturehood. The lie functioned as Eve's *method* of determining what was true and false. The lie became her *working epistemology* – her method of determining and knowing truth (her *epistemic authority*).

Every unbeliever duplicates Eve's approach to knowledge. Instead of seeing God's revelation as His unbreakable, authoritative Word and as life itself for the creature, Eve accepted Satan's prevarication. The structure of Satan's lying "logic" was as follows: there were *two "beings" with two differing opinions. God had one "opinion," the serpent had another.* Therefore, it was up to Eve to decide for herself (she would be an autonomous interpreter). She could decide who was right. She would be the final court of appeal. Her mind would be the final authority. ***Eve all but 'erased' ontology by assuming equal ultimacy of the mind of God, of her mind, and the mind of Satan.*** Her reasoning excluded the exclusive ultimacy of the mind of God. She denied God's absoluteness epistemologically (Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, p. 152).

Eve placed empiricism ahead of divine revelation. By reasoning and experimentation (eating the fruit and seeing its effects and reflecting upon those effects), she would determine what was "true for her." What a clear picture this is of modern man's approach to moral choices. By being in control of truth and knowledge; she would be "number one." The lie was an offer to rise above creaturehood. It offered *independence, autonomy, and omniscience*; it offered *divinity*. In seeking to have the impossible – what belongs to God alone – the human race lost the glorious blessings they did have. They lost the *glory of God, life in God, and their unity in God.*

How to press the antithesis between worldviews

In evangelism we ought to ask questions which illustrate that prime reality is personal; not impersonal. Here are some of those questions: *is it possible to believe a lie about freedom and fulfillment that brings disastrous consequences? Why are there moral consequences for the following behaviors?—lying, stealing, cheating, rage, violence, substance abuse, adultery, habitual porn use, prostitution, suicide. Why is it that a drunk individual passed out in the gutter a degrading thing? Why is teen prostitution and teen suicide so tragic? What moral universal laws drive these consequences? Isn't it true that a transcendent moral order drives the inescapability of moral cause and effect? After all, if matter is ultimate, and the impersonal is prime reality, then moral consequences would not exist (and if they did exist, it would only be the result of temporal social contracts).*

Biblical worldview found in the Holy Scriptures affirms that that the personal is ultimate because our Holy God is self-existent and sovereign over all creation. Thus, we would expect that He would 'energize' and enforce moral cause and effect. Supposedly science insists upon an adequate cause for every effect. The first cause of intelligence, cognitive reasoning, personality, morality, and self-consciousness cannot be dead matter. The doctrine of impersonalism as prime reality is disastrous—it has an incalculably destructive impact upon the sanctity of life, upon fidelity in marriage, upon the rights of the unborn, upon human dignity, upon human purpose, and upon the meaning of the human body and human sexuality.

Is the nature of reality (metaphysics) the domain of science? No, and it never has been until the rise of today's pseudo-science.

There will never a conceivable scientific experiment to determine the nature of reality, or to discover if man possesses an eternal immaterial soul. There will never be a set of equations which describe the divine forces exerted during creation week as recorded in Genesis 1 and 2. Here is the reason why: true science employs the scientific method—repeatable experiments which demonstrate fixed laws. Christian worldview tells us that these are the laws by which God's creation is conserved (so that the order God has created does not fly apart into a chaos—see Colossians 1:15-20; Heb 1:1-3).

We are pressing the antithesis between the two mutually exclusive worldviews. What we are doing is as a form of pre-evangelism. We want to make the unbeliever more epistemologically self-conscious. In other words, we want him to acknowledge where his answers are coming from—and in so doing show him that his faith leap into materialistic worldview is based upon his rebellion against God. The unbeliever's preference for the impersonal is a direct result of his enmity toward God. We gently show him that this is the case—for God has given testimony to man's moral and spiritual condition. When science leaves the realm of empirical study and begins to wear the mantle of philosophy; it immediately moves into the realm of absurdity. If you and I are merely the product of matter and the laws of conservation which govern matter, then we are nothing more than complex biological machines—and our imagined significance is nothing more than an exercise in folly.

Supreme Court Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894) said, “Man has no more significance than a baboon or a grain of sand.” At least Holmes was attempting to be consistent with his worldview in which matter is ultimate. Most materialists seek to evade the logical conclusions that flow from their world and life view (that impersonal matter is prime reality). In order to get significance and meaning, they have to steal it from Christian worldview. They have to reach up into the upper story of what they regard as non-rationality in order to get meaning, morality, purpose, morals significance, etc. Only biblical worldview can account for the transcendental of morality, purpose, rationality, logic, etc.

Unbelievers like to assert that “no one knows for sure; certainty is unattainable; all we will ever have are opinions and probabilities.”

The reason unbelievers assert that absolute universal truth is unknowable is because they wish to escape the Creator’s claims upon them. In essence they want to slay accountability to God. When non-believers maintain this position, they are assuming a number of things. First, they are assuming that their minds are in perfect working order when it comes to the truth of God.

This position could be described as imagining that the mind of man (reason) is ultimate, and therefore perfectly reliable in terms of determining what is true, real, right and wrong. Scripture proclaims the opposite—that they use their minds to studiously suppress the truth (Rom 1:18-23). The Word of God affirms that they prefer to use their intellects to escape into darkness and futility (Jn 3:19-21; Eph 4:17-19). Paul tells us the God is putting the folly of human wisdom on display to destroy it and make an example out of it. “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Cor 1:21).

Unbelievers constantly suggest that certainty (regarding truth, meaning, God, eternity) is unknowable. What does not cross their minds is that they are subscribing to a position which demonstrates not only their hostility toward God, but also their lack of capacity for certainty. In effect they are saying, “Since I am incapable of certainty, certainty is not attainable for anyone.” They are using their own fallen darkened condition as the standard for everyone. The Bible affirms in all of its parts that man needs God to find God. Therefore, it is a complete misrepresentation of God’s self-revelation in Scripture to suggest that man can find the truth all by himself. Jesus said it very clearly, “Men love darkness, they hate the light,” they despise the truth. ***I frequently ask the unbeliever if he believes he is an unbiased truth-seeker, he generally says, “Yes.” It is important at this juncture to let the unbeliever know that he is not the sort of person he thinks he is.*** He is actually filled with prejudices against the truth, even though he is posturing as an unbiased truth seeker. Recently I reiterated to an unbeliever that God’s testimony through Christ regarding the human condition is as follows: *living in sin kills objectivity concerning the truth of God.*

Consequently, to admit that God’s Word is true would be a conflict of interest for the sinner because he would be acknowledging that his sin is damnable, horrific, blinding, distorting, and worthy of divine condemnation. This he simply will not do—therefore he uses his intellectual powers to forge weapons against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:3-5).

Truth is not floating out there somewhere, it is inseparably joined to God’s authority, and it has no existence apart from God.

Truth therefore is an ethical issue. No wonder truth disturbs! God created everything *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. God and matter are not co-eternal. The ramifications of God being Creator of the universe are profound. It means that truth cannot be traced to the properties and behavior of chemicals or to the elemental table. In other words, truth is not one of the properties of carbon or hydrogen or carbon. All truth is God’s truth, and is therefore joined to His authority as Creator, Owner, and Ruler of the creation. Our Christian worldview states that truth has no existence independent of God. Truth cannot therefore be made to stand alone from its source—God Almighty who is the ultimate reference point for all reality. Truth is bound together with God’s self-identification as Author of life and Sovereign Lord of all.

Relativists, secularists, and philosophic naturalists all treat God's truth as if it were non-moral and non-ethical—"truth is not an ethical issue; it is always up for public debate; each person's opinion deserves respect." Of course, that makes man the final arbiter of truth. Man cannot arrogate to himself the role of God without bringing upon himself the most severe consequences including losing touch with ultimate reality. For in that schema of man the final arbiter of truth, the mind of man takes the place of divine revelation. Man's mind (reason) is treated as ultimate, and as the ultimate reference point for all reality. Scripture reveals that this worshipping of the mind—this is the death and darkness; for it moves a person into futility and utter folly (Eph 4:17-19).

Now exposing this cauldron of philosophic poison is God's truth, and God's truth is downright disturbing. Here is the reason why: His truth disturbs because it so radically turns the tables on the sinner. Divine truth says in effect, you cannot take God's measure or stand in judgment upon Him. He is your Creator and Judge. He is upholding your life every moment. This is His universe, and He owns every molecule in it (including every atom that makes up your body). Any other worldview is utterly impossible; for knowledge cannot exist without God.

God's truth hits like a seismic wave that knocks man and his pride off balance. God's truth disturbs because it declares man's accountability to God, and it proclaims God's holiness and man's place in the cosmos as the image of God. It disturbs because it exposes our lusts and idols, our corruption, rebellion and lawlessness. In summary, Christ drove home the point that truth is an ethical issue—and without divine truth as it is in Christ every man or woman will die in his or her sins and face eternal destruction (Jn 8). Man's flight from truth is an offense to God; for sinful men use their God-given intellects to suppress the knowledge of God and to construct an idol depicting their false god which is erected in place of God. ***Divine wrath revealed is the result (Rom 1:18-20). To reiterate, truth is ethical because:***

CAPACITY: they knew God (knowledge of God was evident to them and in them) (Rom 1:19-20).

CULPABILITY: they are guilty, without excuse (no defense) (Rom 1:19-20).

CONSCIENCE: they were created in God's moral image; His moral law is written upon the conscience of every man is a testament to God's moral government (Rom 2:14-16).

CONSEQUENCE: the wrath of God from heaven is revealed against them (for their willful studious suppression of the knowledge of God) (Rom 1:18).

COST: the death of Christ is the cost to God of putting men back into the knowledge of God's truth (Jn 17:19). Only the cross applied to the rebellious sinner can make us hate our imagined sovereignty.

In biblical worldview, everything is first and foremost determined by the nature and character of God (one cannot contemplate the universe with truthfulness without contemplating God). It cannot be said too strongly; *ontology precedes epistemology*. To turn it around and presuppose that epistemology precedes ontology is devastating to the Christian worldview.

The priority of ontology (God's self-existence) governs the Gospel's message. All four Gospels are bent on answering the question, "Who is Jesus?" It is not what He did or even said that is the first matter of importance; it is who He was. If we understand who He is; then His teaching will be powerful and existentially true. Jesus continually anchored the authority of His words in His self-attesting identity. Because He is the Author of life; His death and resurrection will be among the most significant events in the cosmos (p. 57).

Christian worldview derives its unity from our Triune God whose essential character establishes the moral order of the universe; and whose Word, and wisdom, and Law define and govern all aspects of the created existence (Sire, p. 43). God is our ontological reference point, "God. . . is that

ultimate reality whose Trinitarian nature, personal character, moral excellence, wonderful works and sovereign rule constitute the objective reference point for all reality. . . . The meaning of the universe and the authority to determine it are not open questions since both are fixed in the existence and character of God. Relativism and subjectivism are thereby excluded” (Naugle quoted in Sire, p. 43).

Jesus blistered His hearers with these words, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe.”

Our generation is fantastically guilty of this – we reason, “if I just had some real evidence that your Word is true.” The rich man and Lazarus (Lu 16:19). The rich man in Hades, *my brothers are scientifically, evidence-oriented kind of men. Just show them a sign that was unanswerable. Send Lazarus back from the dead, then they will believe!* Abraham said NO, if they didn’t believe Moses and the Prophets, they won’t believe if someone they know comes back from the dead.

Many contemporary evangelical apologists are still reasoning like that rich man in Hades -- with a convincing enough sign, men will repent. No, if they do not respect the Word of God, “a powerful” evidence will not turn them (Whitcomb). When the unbeliever rejects Christ, he is also rejecting Christ as *interpreter of the world (Christ’s interpretation of the world includes the whole world of knowledge)*. To reject Christ is to reject Christ as *interpreter of the world*; and thus, to remain with Satan’s interpretation of the world (a la *the Edenic Lie*) (Stitzinger, *Apologetics Syllabus*, TMS, p. 36).

Our methodology must reflect a fidelity to the epistemic Lordship of Christ. Semi-rationalistic apologetics fails to do this. It fails to deliver the final blow which is found in Romans 1. Until that final blow is delivered, the natural man tosses Christian evidences over his head into a sea of probability. As long as the Christian apologist remains on the battlefield armed only with the high “probability” that the events of Scripture took place; he allows the assumed autonomy of the unbeliever to remain undisturbed. The presuppositional apologist utilizes Romans one, and, in so doing he attacks and exposes the mechanism of the unbeliever (suppression, speculation, futility, etc.). Only then is the ultimacy of chance and contingency properly cast down so that Christ’s epistemic role may have its proper and authoritative place (Stitzinger, p. 152). ***Probability is inferred when evidences are not accompanied by challenges to the unbeliever’s epistemology, philosophy of fact, worldview, etc.***

We were created for certainty, but it is only attainable by submitting to our Creator through the Lord Jesus Christ.

According to the Word of God the condition for certainty is a willingness to believe and obey and please God as He is revealed in the Word (Jn 7:17). Epistemological certainty is a function of being willing to do God’s will. Sinful man treats his reasoning processes as if they are autonomous. The truth is that there is but one autonomous Being—Almighty God. Man is not in touch with reality or his own humanness unless his mind is the total servant of the Word of God. This is because we are made by God and for God.

There is no wisdom and knowledge without the fear of God as our starting point (Prov 1:7). The reason is clear in Scripture: man cannot transcend his own creaturehood. He was created to operate by divine counsel as a dependent creature. His intellect was fashioned by God to receive divine revelation and to interpret everything to the glory of God. Therefore, the incredible arrogance and hubris of the Enlightenment becomes evident when one considers that those thinkers proposed that man could erect an intellectual tower by which to ascertain and interpret all reality WITHOUT reference to God. This is the natural man asserting the non-created-ness of reality. It can only end darkness, death, and separation. God’s Word states “In Thy light we see light,” (Ps 36:9). In other words, we only see

clearly through the lens of divine revelation, for God gives us categories, definitions, purposes, and limitations on what He has made, including man.

Carl Sagan, self-appointed evangelist for naturalism and lobbyist for SETI (search for extraterrestrial intelligence) was asked what he would do if he were able to contact an ET. Carl said, “I would immediately ask the E.T., who are we humans and where did we come from?” Sagan would sit at the feet of an E.T. but rejects the authoritative world and life view given to us by Jesus Christ. Like Eve in the Garden of Eden listening to Lucifer’s lie, Sagan demonstrates that he is under the influence of Lucifer’s lie: he puts epistemology ahead of ontology which guarantees error.

One cannot contemplate the universe truthfully without contemplating God. All facts reveal God.

The truth about God is the pre-condition of knowledge: *ontology precedes epistemology*. Without that order, culture inevitably slides into absurdity and futility in its reasoning. The relationships between facts are testaments to God’s goodness and wisdom. For example: rainfall, photosynthesis, honey bees, dairy cows, and ice cream. The relationships between these facts are established by God and but a tiny portion of His goodness and blessing. The world has reasonability, order, and rationality because of God’s design in creation.

Christ’s self-attesting self-identification is inseparable from the authority of His words (Jn 12:48-50). Christ’s claim to infallibility is joined to placing ontology ahead of epistemology. Satan’s lie reverses the order, and as such produces a murderous lie which has spread throughout the human race. This lie (the content of the darkness of the human soul) is only expelled via the gospel. Now what surprises people is that we bring the gospel to men *unproven*. Again the reason why is that ontology precedes epistemology—“thus saith the Lord” is sufficient.

God is calling sinful men to repent of intellectual futility. There is no higher source of verification than Christ’s epistemic authority (Col 2:2-3). Thus, our strategy in apologetics and evangelism must reflect Christ’s authority over all knowledge. The ontological distance between Creator and creature is infinite (only bridged in Christ our incarnate Lord). Christ’s work for sinners reverses the lie of Eden and recovers the order necessary to human rationality: ontology precedes epistemology (restoring God to the place of ultimate authority and reference point over the creature). God’s self-existence is the foundation of all rationality, all human predication, and all knowledge. Apart from God’s revelation, facts are like gravy with nothing to order them or give them ‘shape’.

This immediately takes us back to the foundational ultimate question: *Has God ever revealed Himself clearly, infallibly, and authoritatively? If so, where has He done this?* This question is pivotal because the natural man is at war with God—who and what He is in His Being. Mankind’s war with God is not just with what God has said in the Holy Scriptures, but with God’s self-identification. This is the battlefield: *Who is self-existent, Who is independent, Who is ultimate? Who determines knowledge? Who is the ultimate reference point? Is it God or man?*

The arrogance of the natural man is incredible—for men assert that they can talk, write, and communicate clearly without the content of their communication being falsified; but they assert that God can’t write, talk, or communicate clearly. Our apologetic methodology must be to point out the substitute god upon which the unbeliever depends. And we must point out why these idols will fail miserably what is promised. Again, the ultimate issue is the self-contained (self-existent) ontological Trinity. If the knowledge of God is rejected, man will turn to idols for *epistemology, certainty, rationality, morality, and interpretation*.