

Apologetics *in* Conversation

Vincent Cheung

Copyright © 2004 by Vincent Cheung

PO Box 15662, Boston, MA 02215, USA

<http://www.vincentcheung.com>

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted without the prior permission of the author or publisher.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
1. AFFIRM THE INEVITABLE.....	7
2. ATTACK THE ENEMY	13
3. ARRANGE THE CLASH.....	31
4. ANNOUNCE THE OUTCOME.....	43
CONCLUSION	48

INTRODUCTION

Our subject is apologetics. Specifically, I have in mind the intellectual vindication of the biblical worldview and the destruction of all non-biblical worldviews in the context of informal debates, such as in personal conversations.

Formal debates are regulated by elaborate rules, time limitations, and each side are often called upon to defend or refute previously announced propositions. These factors combine to construct a rather "artificial" environment for intellectual confrontations. To gain the advantage in such a situation, one must not only understand the intellectual merits of his position and the fallacies in his opponent's position, but he must know how to convincingly present his arguments within the restrictions imposed by the rules of formal debate. He must think and operate strategically.

However, most people rarely if ever participate in formal debates. They are more likely to debate the intellectual merits of their beliefs in informal settings – at home, at work, with strangers on the plane, or with professors in the classroom. Of course, even in these situations, one must think and operate strategically – some "moves" are still better than others.

One difference is that the flow of the intellectual confrontation is no longer molded by the rules of formal debate. It is also true that even informal debates are often restricted by time limitations, the willingness of the participants, and so forth. Some situations permit the conversation to last for only several minutes, in which case the believer must perform an immediate "take down" of the unbeliever's position, sum up the biblical worldview the best he can, and in general try to say enough for his hearer to ponder later.

Thus perhaps the informal debate in which every issue is thoroughly discussed remains a rarity or even an ideal. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for a private discussion on religion to last several hours, and sometimes to be carried on for even weeks or months. This allows the believer to completely present and defend the biblical worldview, and to thoroughly examine and destroy the unbeliever's entire belief system.

Although the biblical approach to apologetics can easily function and triumph in both formal and informal debates, an informal setting presents the biblical apologist with a delicious opportunity. A champion boxer might be able to knock down his opponent whether in a boxing ring or on the street. The difference is that nobody is "saved by the bell" in a street fight, thus giving our champion the opportunity to thoroughly bludgeon his opponent.

Likewise, although the biblical approach to apologetics can devastate our non-Christian opponents in both formal and informal debates, the restrictions of formal debates provide them with some measure of protection from our relentless attacks. Of course, in informal

debates, our opponents can still abort the confrontation by physically fleeing our presence, but their pride often holds them captive, thus giving us the opportunity to make our victory obvious and complete.

In what follows, I will present several important principles in biblical apologetics¹ that enhance one's performance and effectiveness when defending the faith in informal settings. These often neglected principles sound simple, but they are the divine weapons that God has given to us to ensure our victory in spiritual and intellectual confrontations against unbelievers and blasphemers.

Since the true understanding and the proper use of these principles are possible only when one has as his intellectual foundation a biblical system of theology and philosophy, as well as a biblical approach to apologetics, I am mainly addressing those who are already familiar with some of my previous works, especially my *Systematic Theology*, *Ultimate Questions*, and *Presuppositional Confrontations*, and who are in essential agreement with what I have written.

This is of paramount importance because a biblical approach to apologetics, when given time to operate, such as in an informal discussion spanning several hours, will completely obliterate any unbiblical idea, theory, or argument. Thus if the Christian himself holds to an unbiblical view of, say, epistemology, he will discover that his attack against the unbeliever's epistemology using our biblical presuppositional arguments will also destroy his own unbiblical epistemology. For this same reason, it is impossible for Arminians to properly employ the biblical approach to apologetics, simply because Arminianism is unbiblical, so that such an approach to apologetics will just as readily destroy Arminianism as it does atheism, or any other unbiblical idea or system.

When Paul talks about our conflict against demonic forces and anti-biblical ideas, he sometimes employs warfare metaphors, and thus some parts of our discussion on apologetics will arise from them and refer to them. Now, at least partly because of recent events related to Islamic terrorism, many people have become especially sensitive to warfare language in the context of religion. Therefore, let me state at the outset that when I employ such language, I am speaking metaphorically. I am referring to *spiritual* warfare – intellectual conflicts that are resolved by rational arguments, and *not* by physical violence. Perhaps some people would prefer that we avoid warfare metaphors altogether, but since Scripture itself uses these metaphors, such a preference is itself a "pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5), and therefore it is a preference that I refuse to accommodate.

¹ Since I believe that my approach to apologetics has been faithfully derived from the Bible, in what follows, I will refer to "my approach" and the "biblical approach" interchangeably, just as I would call Christianity "my faith," "my religion," or "my worldview," and Christian theology "my theology." The point is that I do not assert, but rather deny, that "my approach" to apologetics is the result of my own philosophical speculation or reflection; instead, I assert that it is the same approach as that which is taught in and implied by Scripture.

There are those who assert that if a person is zealously committed to his religion, then he is by definition a dangerous fanatic, just like the Islamic terrorists. They say this without regard for what the religion actually teaches, and whether what it teaches is true. Some of them assume that all religions are false and even dangerous in the first place, so that religious zeal is never productive, let alone rationally justified. This is an ignorant and irrational position, and again, it is precisely one of those ideas that we can refute by biblical apologetics, and that we must demand the unbelievers to defend.

As for me, I am not ashamed of Paul's warfare metaphors. I will make my meaning clear to help prevent misunderstandings, but I will not apologize for giving Scripture's warfare language full expression, recognition, adaptation, and application in my writings on apologetics. No, I am not ashamed of Paul at all, but I am indeed ashamed of those professing Christians who shrink back from patterning their speech after the Word of God. After this extended clarification, I disavow any responsibility for any misunderstanding in this area. My guess is that some people will still distort and criticize, but I refuse to be bullied into submission, into avoiding legitimate biblical expressions and thinking patterns.

Finally, the following principles are not to be taken as rigid steps to be used or presented in any fixed order or manner; rather, they represent attitudes and agendas that the believer must keep in mind during debate, flexibly and fluidly blending them together in natural conversation in his intellectual confrontation with the unbeliever.

I had wanted to organize the following materials better, and perhaps include additional details and items, along with some advanced materials. However, since I am reluctant to tolerate further delay, and since there are other writing projects awaiting my attention, I have decided to quickly put together what follows. If the demand is there, then I might consider offering a revised and expanded version at a later time.

1. AFFIRM THE INEVITABLE

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-31

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

1 CORINTHIANS 2:14-16

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

Scripture teaches that, in accordance with his own wisdom, God has determined that human wisdom would never discover the true nature of reality, the foundation of which is God himself. He has also determined to place the wisdom that leads to salvation beyond the reach of human speculation. By this, he intends to frustrate human wisdom, to destroy human pride, and to crush every human aspiration that exalts itself against the wisdom of God. All non-Christian systems of thought begin, proceed, and end in intellectual and practical failure. Thus God has made all non-Christian philosophies and religions foolish and futile.

Non-Christian worldviews are foolish because they are irrational. A rational way of thinking and knowing arrives at conclusions validly and necessarily deduced from true premises. But unbelievers have no way of knowing true premises, and neither do they reason by valid deductions; rather, they make themselves the ultimate reference point for knowledge, falsely supposing that they could discover the nature of reality through intuition, sensation, and induction. The alleged revelations in non-Christian religions are no different, since they are in fact human inventions.

Non-Christian worldviews are futile because, being foolish, they cannot discover the highest good; moreover, they fail to attain even their own designated ends. Those that promise social utopias end in poverty and oppression, those that preach nirvana result in failure and disappointment, if not insanity, and those that profess to seek God apart from the biblical revelation achieve nothing but ensure their followers a place in hell. Apart from biblical revelation, all human thinking and all human striving result in utter futility – in defeat, despair, and death.

If anyone were to discover truth and attain salvation, it must be by God's sovereign grace and effectual calling. In accordance with his own will, God often calls and saves those who are considered inferior by human standards, and he has chosen them in order to embarrass and frustrate those who rely on and judge by these very standards. He uses the "lowly things" and "despised things" to bring to nothing those who consider themselves something.

All this is God's will and God's design. He does this so that no one may boast about himself, and that if anyone were to boast, he may boast only about what God has done in Christ. God's will is not only that man cannot attain salvation by his own sinful reasoning, but that he cannot attain even rationality and knowledge by his own power. Scripture does not contrast between the native human abilities of the Christians and the non-Christians; rather, it makes a contrast between man's abilities and God's abilities – between human power and divine power, the wisdom of man and the wisdom of God. When these are pitted against each other, there is no contest, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."

If even "the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom," then if one can obtain even a small, tiny, minute, and an almost insignificant portion of divine wisdom, he will be able to easily and utterly crush in debate any person who is operating on human wisdom. This is the basis for victory in biblical apologetics. God has revealed a portion of his divine wisdom in Scripture. Those whom he has summoned to himself by the gospel are also granted to learn and affirm the teachings of Scripture. Thus they share God's perspective; they share a portion of God's knowledge; they know something about God's way of thinking, and they begin to pattern their thoughts after him. In short, they have "the mind of Christ."

It follows that as long as we depend on God's wisdom, as long as we closely adhere to the biblical worldview as revealed in Scripture – that is, as long as we follow the mind of

Christ and not revert to our former way of thinking – we will be able to easily and utterly crush any non-Christian in debate. Just as no non-Christian can defeat the mind of Christ, no non-Christian can defeat anyone who follows the mind of Christ in all that he thinks and believes.

The only reason why any Christian would lose or appear to lose when debating a non-Christian is because, at least during the course of the debate, the Christian has failed to stay close to God's way of thinking; instead, he has in some way reverted to his former non-Christian way of thinking. In other words, he is attempting to use non-Christian wisdom to defend the Christian worldview. Now, because non-Christian thinking is so irrational and conflicting, amidst the confusion the Christian might often appear to succeed even if he falls short of using biblical arguments, but this is not how a Christian should win any debate. In any case, clear and decisive victory is ours when we arrange the debate to pit human wisdom against divine wisdom.

I say all of this to get across one of the most important principles in biblical apologetics – namely, that if you learn and apply the biblical approach to apologetics, you will be able to decisively crush any non-Christian in debate. You will be able to completely bewilder and embarrass any unbeliever.

Of course, there are basic and advanced principles when it comes to biblical apologetics, but as long as one has the minimal mental capacity to learn several simple maneuvers that serve to apply biblical knowledge and sound reasoning to an intellectual discussion, even a toddler who has learned to perform biblical apologetics can easily demolish a professor of philosophy in debate.

The gaps in experience and education would make only a superficial difference. What matters is the toddler's ability to clearly confront the philosopher's human wisdom with Scripture's divine wisdom. As David said to Goliath, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied" (1 Samuel 17:45). Goliath's human strength was irrelevant, because David was going up against him with divine power. Likewise, an old educated moron is still a moron, and all he has more of is pride, not wisdom. In contrast, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding" (Psalm 111:10).

Some of you might not understand why I say that this is one of the most important principles in biblical apologetics. Since it is a biblical teaching, you might agree that it is true, and maybe even think that it is good to know, but you cannot imagine how it will help you become a more effective apologist. However, not only is this one of the most important principles in biblical apologetics, but for some people, and especially those who have already learned the biblical approach to apologetics, it is *the* missing factor in their quest to becoming invincible apologists.

For many Christians, the number one hindrance in apologetics is their respect for or even fear of non-Christian minds and ideas. These Christians have been told, often by the non-

Christians themselves, that the non-Christians are the intellectual elite of this world. Even Christian ministers acknowledge to their congregations that many non-Christians are highly intelligent, and that many of their ideas are deep and brilliant. So when the typical Christian comes up against a non-Christian in debate, he often assumes that although the non-Christian is ultimately wrong, this opponent will still have many intelligent questions and difficult objections against the Christian faith, and that even if he manages to overcome the non-Christian's intellectual assault, there will be a hard struggle, and the result will not be clear and decisive.

This false belief about the non-Christian's intelligence produces a strong mental block in many aspiring apologists. Time and time again, Christians have asked me how to answer certain questions and objections from unbelievers. Sometimes I could understand why they did not know how to answer. For example, some of the questions had to do with certain aspects of the Christian faith that not all believers have studied.² Yet it often seemed to me that the Christians should have been able to easily answer the questions and objections without asking me, especially those who have already learned the basics of biblical apologetics. Many of them were hindered because they had falsely assumed that these questions and objections from the non-Christians must have been more intelligent than it seemed, and thus must have been more difficult to answer than it appeared.

Let me speak plainly (as if I do not always!): One reason why some Christians have not reached the level of competence in apologetics that they see in me is because they have not even come close to attaining my deep contempt for all non-Christian ideas, theories, philosophies, and religions. Thus they are still blind to the true strength of the biblical worldview, and blind to the roll-on-the-floor, sidesplittingly laughable lunacy of all non-Christian thinking. In fact, this aspect of my teachings on apologetics is perhaps one of the most repulsive even to Christian apologists, but this is why they will never be able to fully unleash the power of biblical apologetics to destroy our opponents, and this is why their answers to unbelievers will often be weak, indecisive, and compromising.

In 2 Kings 6, we read that the king of Aram had sent his army to capture Elisha. When the horses and chariots surrounded the prophet and his servant, the servant panicked and asked, "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" Elisha told him, "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them," and then he prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." "Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (see v. 11-17). Likewise, divine wisdom and power are on our side, but we need to pray for spiritual sight, so that we may perceive the wisdom of God as well as the folly of the heathens.

Again, even many Christian ministers who are otherwise sound in doctrine extol the wisdom of unbelieving men, but to do this is unbiblical, unproductive, and unnecessary. Rather, Scripture teaches that all the thoughts of the unbelievers are foolish and futile,

² This is why although what we are now discussing is just *one* of the most important principles in biblical apologetics, *the* single most important thing that you can do to become a better apologist is to study systematic theology.

stupid and sinful. At best, we can say that their ideas are wise only according to *human standards*; that is, they are wise only when they approve themselves, and when they judge themselves by their own sinful standards. But from God's perspective – that is, from the objective, realistic, and biblical perspective – all unbelieving thoughts are irrational and rebellious. Let Christian ministers, then, speak in agreement with Scripture, instead of sending mixed messages to our people that undermine their confidence and obscure their spiritual vision.

Of course, I am not suggesting that we should underestimate our opponents, but we must not avoid underestimating them by *overestimating* them. We must not knowingly affirm something false about them. Rather, we must evaluate our opponents in the light of biblical wisdom: "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:22). In other words, they think they are smart, but they are stupid. Let every professing Christian who refuses to accept and apply this truth tear out this page from his Bible, or better yet, abandon apologetics altogether. Leave it to those of us who really mean it to contend for the faith.

We avoid becoming careless in debate by meticulously listening to the arguments from our opponents, scrutinizing every word, every proposition, the relationship between every word and every proposition, every inference and every implication. We avoid underestimating our opponents by committing ourselves to use overwhelming intellectual force in dismantling every aspect of their worldviews, philosophies, and religions. We are satisfied with nothing less than the total intellectual annihilation of every aspect of their systems of thought. And we can do this because even the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and through the Word and the Spirit of God, we indeed have the mind of Christ. On the other hand, some believers expect such high competence from their opponents that they blind themselves to the glaring errors that pervade all anti-biblical arguments.

On the biblical basis that God has rendered all non-Christians foolish and futile, that divine wisdom is infinitely greater than human wisdom, and that I have the mind of Christ through what God has revealed in Scripture, I engage every anti-biblical question, objection, or argument knowing that there is not one non-Christian in this world who can defeat me in debate. It matters not whether he is an atheist or a Buddhist, a Muslim or a Mormon, a philosopher or a scientist. As long as my opponent's worldview is not identical to that of the Bible, there is no possibility that he can defeat me. In fact, if all the non-Christians in this world were to come together against me, it would not make one bit of difference. On the other hand, given the proper conditions – for example, that there is sufficient time, and that both sides wish to complete the debate – I will seize complete and decisive victory every time.

We can also consider this principle from the perspective of faith or unbelief. If you are a Christian, then you ought to believe the Scripture. If you believe the Scripture, then you ought to believe that divine wisdom is greater than human wisdom, and that God has granted you some of his wisdom, that he has allowed you to see things from his perspective, and that he has revealed to you some of his thoughts, so that you have the

mind of Christ. If you have the mind of Christ, if you think in line with divine wisdom, then provided that you do not deviate from this way of thinking, no non-Christian can defeat you in debate; instead, you will be able to see through and refute any non-Christian argument and position.

You can either allow unbelief to hinder you, or unleash divine wisdom to devastate your opponents by faith. You can say with the unbelieving Israelites, "We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them" (Numbers 13:33). Or, on the basis that God has rendered non-Christian thinking foolish and futile, you can say with Joshua and Caleb, "Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them" (14:9).

Because my approach to apologetics wholly depends on biblical revelation, I know that I can win every time. This confidence is not based on any unique intellectual endowment that I think I possess, but it is based on the superiority of God's wisdom as revealed in Scripture, which is available to, and in principle affirmed by, every Christian. Therefore, if you learn to wholly depend on biblical wisdom as you defend the faith, you also will win every time. If you have been paying attention, and if you are responding and submitting to the words of Scripture that I have been trying to get across to you, then you are probably sensing a new confidence arising in your heart. No, this is not a confidence in yourself, but it is a legitimate and rational confidence in the greatness and superiority of God's wisdom.

We do not claim to be intellectually superior to the unbelievers *in ourselves*; rather, we freely admit that, *by human standards*, many of us were intellectually inferior to the unbelievers before our conversion, and when judged by God's standards, we were fools just like all the non-Christians. However, since then, God has sovereignly regenerated and enlightened us, and by giving us the mind of Christ, he has made us intellectually far superior to all non-Christians. Therefore, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

2. ATTACK THE ENEMY

2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Some of our opponents are outwardly hostile. They might insult us, mock us, and call us names.³ They regard us as fools, fanatics, and the scum of the earth, and they are not afraid to tell us. Others appear more normal, and they will talk to you about religion seemingly with the same attention and respect that they will show when speaking about serious matters with non-Christians. Then, some appear so polite that they sound patronizing and obnoxious.

However, as long as they are all unbelievers, these are all superficial differences. Many Christians wish to consider their religious discussions with non-Christians as friendly dialogues between fellow human beings who are both interested in discovering truth through rational investigations. But this is unbiblical and unrealistic. It is true that many unbelievers appear sincere and courteous, but God looks at the thoughts and intentions of men, and not just their appearance and demeanor.

You might protest that, unlike God, we cannot directly perceive people's hearts; however, it does not follow that we must therefore judge people according to their appearance. In another context, Jesus said, "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment" (John 7:24). Indeed, we cannot directly perceive people's hearts, but we do not need to, because Scripture tells us what is in their hearts. Scripture tells us what God perceives when he looks past their appearance. When God looks at them, he does not see a group of civilized and educated gentlemen, but he sees a generation of vipers, lewd

³ Here I am referring only to instances when our hostile opponents call us derogatory names *without rational justification*. Contrary to what many people seem to think, "name-calling" is *not* always an informal fallacy. If the derogatory name or label appears in the context of a valid argument, and is the result of this argument, then the name or label is in fact a logical conclusion, not an informal fallacy. For example, I have a perfect rational right to call the atheist a "moron" if I can provide rational justification for applying this word to the atheist, or if it comes at the end of a sound argument. Just because some people do not like this logical conclusion does not make it a fallacy; rather, to protest against it without logical justification is itself a fallacy. For someone to commit a name-calling *fallacy*, he must commit some *logical* error in his application of the name or label. This goes for both Christians and non-Christians. If the person who applies the name or label can logically show that it fits his opponent, then it cannot be a fallacy, no matter how insulting the name sounds. Also, if the application of the name or label is in fact part of the person's worldview, then he must be permitted to express it just as he is permitted to express any part of his worldview during the course of debate, so that his beliefs can be discussed and examined, and so that he can tell his opponent precisely what he affirms and wishes to defend.

beasts, stubborn mules, and vicious dogs. He sees a group of morons, idolaters, and God-haters.

All humans are born sinful and rebellious, and because all unbelievers have never been converted by God, they remain sinful and rebellious, no matter how sincere and courteous they appear to you. As Christians, we are indeed intellectually and morally superior, but we are superior only because God has changed us and *made* us superior by his sovereign grace, and not by our own will or work. We freely admit that we were just as stupid and evil as our non-Christian opponents, but this does not change the fact that they are indeed stupid and evil, that their friendly appearance is superficial, and that their gentle speech is insincere.

When an unbeliever claims to seek understanding about our faith, or even when he claims to seek salvation through Christ, and even if God would eventually regenerate and convert him, as long as he is still an unbeliever and unregenerate at that moment, then at that moment he is still inwardly insincere and spiritually hostile. In connection with this, there are two relevant sections in John Gerstner's *Theology in Dialogue* that read as follows:

C: No. God makes no promises to his unregenerate enemies.

I: You are a hard master.

C: I admit that these things are very stern, but I do remind you that a sinner is an enemy of God. He has declared war on God. You are such a sinner and you are at war with God.

I: Even though I am seeking God?

C: Yes, I cannot remind you too often that you are not *truly* seeking Him.... This is where Paul's use of that language in Romans 3 comes in. He says there that none seeks after God. What he means is that no one in his natural fallen state sincerely seeks after God. There are some in the fallen state who, shall I say, insincerely seek after God, as you are doing now....⁴

I: What makes you say that the Bible says I do not mean what I say? Where does the Bible say that I do not want to come to Christ?

C: Christ says Himself, in John 3:19, "This is the condemnation, that light has come into the world and men love the darkness rather than the light." In other words, Christ says that unconverted persons do not come to Him who is the light of the world. They do not want to come to Him because they love the darkness and He is

⁴ John H. Gerstner, *Theology in Dialogue* (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996), p. 406-407.

the light. According to your own confession, you are still an unconverted person. That means you are a lover of darkness, not of light. Consequently, you cannot sincerely want to come to Christ.⁵

In other words, because an unbeliever is still inwardly rebellious toward God, even when he appears to sincerely inquire about your faith, there is always an evil ulterior motive. Of course, if God has chosen him for salvation, then it may be that God has ordained the occasion to convert him. His conversion would then still be a result of God's sovereign grace, on the occasion of his inquiry, and in spite of his evil motive. The non-Christian himself might be deceived, and thinks that he is asking honest questions out of a sincere motive to understand; however, as long as he remains unconverted, he is inquiring out of pride, rebellion, and selfishness, and he remains an enemy and a hater of God.

I am saying all of this not because I want you to react by becoming outwardly hostile to unbelievers, but I want you to consider our intellectual engagement with them as a spiritual war. If you pay attention to only the superficial signs, and if you are looking for only physical indications of hostility, then indeed our debates and discussions with unbelievers often do not appear overly hostile. However, physical signs are almost irrelevant because we are talking about a *spiritual* war, and the *spiritual* hostility between Christians and non-Christians. When we start to notice the differences in thoughts and motives, ideas and beliefs, then we immediately perceive that our intellectual engagement with unbelievers is a war between good and evil, between wisdom and folly, and between God and Satan.

Too many Christians address non-Christians on the basis of their common humanity, and therefore it seems to them that the engagement is just a friendly dialogue between peers about the important issues of life. In fact, many people's evangelistic and apologetic efforts are so man-centered that it is as if they are standing with the unbelievers on one side, while God is on the other side. However, as Christians, we must address non-Christians on the basis of what we have in common *with God* and *with other Christians*, and on the basis of our *differences* with non-Christians.⁶ Jesus said that whoever is not with him is against him; therefore, if you are on the side of Christ, all non-Christians are on the other side in opposition against you and your Lord. As Paul writes:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." "Therefore come out from

⁵ Ibid., p. 426-427.

⁶ In theological language, I am calling for us to remember the "antithesis" between Christians and non-Christians.

them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." (2 Corinthians 6:14-17)

Although we can have friendly relationships with non-Christians on the superficial level, Scripture insists that we are at war with them on the spiritual level. Thus when you speak to an unbeliever about your faith, do not regard it as an instance of two human beings joining together to seek truth. You already have the truth – you are explaining and defending it, while the unbeliever is resisting it, challenging it, and often even blaspheming it. Whether he uses a friendly or hostile demeanor is only of superficial importance. As long as he is an unbeliever, he is defying your God, and it is not up to you to be indifferent or dispassionate about it; rather, you must place your jealousy for God's honor far above your concern and sympathy for the unbeliever. Man-centered empathy is to be discarded altogether. God sees the situation as war; therefore, you must also see it as war. Failing to see our situation as God sees it is to defy God, and to stifle apologetics.

Also, contrary to the way many believers think, it is unbiblical to sharply separate people with their beliefs and actions. It is convenient to say, "I am not against you, I am against only your beliefs and actions" – this is an excuse for the professing believer to pay lip service to biblical teachings about the "antithesis," and at the same time speak and act as if there is no antithesis. Blasphemies and heresies do not invade people's mind by themselves – *people* embrace and spread them; likewise, sins do not happen by themselves – *people* sin, and *they* sin because *they* are evil. Accordingly, the enemies of God are not just the unbiblical beliefs and actions, but the *people* who embrace these beliefs and perform these actions, and God is going to send both the unbelieving beliefs and the unbelieving people to hell.

Scripture indeed teaches that we do not war after "flesh and blood," and some take this to mean that the war has nothing to do with people altogether, but that it has to do with only their beliefs and actions, and perhaps also with demonic powers. However, this is contrary to biblical teaching, because even at the very beginning, God said that the conflict would be against the serpent's "offspring" (Genesis 3:15) – that is, not just the devil, but also the followers of the devil.

That we do not war after "flesh and blood" means only that our conflict is not physical, so that we do not employ physical strategies and weapons, and we do not seek to inflict physical injuries to our opponents. Rather, since the war is spiritual, our weapons are also spiritual, and instead of using guns and bombs, we pray, we preach, and we argue. In any case, Scripture recognizes that our opponents include *people*, and not just beliefs and actions, or even evil spirits, only that our conflict with these people cannot and should not be settled by physical violence, but instead by spiritual power and rational persuasion.

Since we are warring against unbelievers, and not just dialoguing with them, then just as fighting any war consists of both defense and offense, we must learn to perform both intellectual defense and offense in apologetics. Some Christians act as if apologetics is mainly or even only about defense, about answering questions and neutralizing

objections. Of course we must skillfully respond to questions and objections, but in a war, defense is only part of the fight.

As mentioned, as long as he remains unconverted, the unbeliever is not a sincere seeker. He never asks humble and honest questions; he does not want to understand and believe. Instead, with his whole heart he wants to defy God and justify himself. He speaks to you out of a strong but unjustified intellectual pride. He thinks that he is smart and rational, and that you are stupid and irrational. Since this is what he thinks, he will not approach you sincerely thinking that if you can just answer several questions that still perplex him, then he will surely believe. He does not sincerely think that you could be right, and that Christianity could be true to the exclusion of all other worldviews, philosophies, and religions.

Therefore, he will not accept defeat just because you are able to answer several of his questions and objections. To his mind, you could not possibly be right, and so he will keep on asking one question after another, and raising one objection after another. It does not mean that *any* of these questions and objections are rational or forceful, but this is irrelevant – since there is logically an infinite number of questions and objections that one can raise about any proposition, as long as he lives, he can continue to inquire and to challenge, even if each question or objection differs only on minor details.

Of course, this is not to say that the unbeliever cannot be defeated – any unbeliever can easily, totally, and decisively be defeated. I am only pointing out that, without the sovereign work of God in his heart, no unconverted person is sincerely prepared to accept your faith. All of his questions and objections are insincere – they are just means of attack, not sincere questions and objections that pose as true hindrances to faith. Is the unbeliever really so concerned about the problem of evil so that he would come to faith if you give him a rational answer? Would the unbeliever really believe in Christ just because you argue for biblical infallibility in a way that he cannot rationally object? No, his questions and objections are just smoke screens. He will not accept your faith as true even if you answer all of his initial questions and objections – he can always invent more. The unbeliever rejects the gospel because he is stupid and sinful, but at the same time insists that he is in fact smart and moral.

Biblical apologetics indeed entails answering questions and objections to show that Christianity can provide a true and coherent response to any rational challenge; however, you must not just sit there and wait for the next question or objection. The unbeliever's stupidity and sinfulness cause him to think a certain way and believe certain things, and as long as he finds safe harbor in his own way of thinking, he will continue to stubbornly invent silly questions and objections against the Christian faith. Therefore, in addition to defending your own biblical beliefs, you must launch a comprehensive, meticulous, and devastating attack against your opponent. You must initiate and maintain an offensive that destroys the unbeliever's very way of thinking, and either explicitly or implicitly destroy all of his unbiblical ideas.

For example, your opponent may claim to believe in science, and claim that science contradicts Christianity, and therefore Christianity must be false. He might offer you an example of how the study of biology seems to contradict certain biblical teachings. Some Christians, if they know something about science, will either challenge the scientific assertion cited, or explain how it can be reconciled with biblical teachings. But then the unbeliever will move on to an objection from physics, and then chemistry, and then psychology, and so on. Again, it is not that there is any weight to any of these questions or objections, but the person who does not wish to admit defeat can always *invent* something to ask.

Rather than passively enduring your opponent's endless questions and objections, you must launch an attack against his very way of thinking. Since his intellectual pride lacks rational justification in the first place, unless God regenerates and converts him, this pride will probably remain no matter what you do; however, you can at least expose the fact that his sense of intellectual superiority is irrational and unjustified. Indeed, you may respond to each of his scientific objections, but with each response, you must also adopt an overall offensive strategy that undermines his claim to rationality. You must attack the rationality and formulation of each of his scientific objections; you must challenge his reliance on science and the rationality of science itself; and you must question his very intelligence.

This is the biblical way. You must actively and endlessly attack everything about your opponent's thinking. You must demolish every argument and capture every thought. You must attack his beliefs more strongly and skillfully than he attacks yours. You must intellectually humiliate him, and expose the illusion that his pride is rationally justified. Because this is what biblical apologetics demands, it follows that you must develop and perfect your "take down" technique in debate.

To begin, we should recall our discussion from the previous chapter, that because God has rendered all unbelievers foolish and futile, we can always defeat them in argumentation when we affirm a biblical system of theology and apply the principles of biblical apologetics. A specific application of this means that we can always defeat any question or objection raised against the Christian faith, and more than that, we can destroy every idea within our opponent's system of thought. Indeed, our task is to demolish every argument and capture every thought that defies what God has revealed in Scripture.

On this biblical basis, our broad offensive strategy is to attack *everything* in our opponent's worldview, everything he says, and everything he implies. We should turn every question into an opportunity to undermine his intellectual pride, and use every objection as a springboard to destroy his sense of intellectual superiority.

Those who are trying to learn my method of apologetics often fail to learn this principle. Perhaps they consider it an exaggeration, or perhaps they do not realize what "everything" entails, so I want to make it very clear. When I say to attack everything, I mean *everything*, and everything about everything that has to do with anything in the

opponent's system of thought. When I say "everything," I am referring to every word, every definition of every word, every implication of every word, every proposition, every connection between every proposition, every assumption, every speculation, every inference, every question, every objection, every contradiction – *everything*.

This is not a strategy to avoid answering our opponents, nor is it an attempt to impede the progress of debate. We do answer our opponents, and we do facilitate progress in debate, but this principle of attack necessarily arises from our own worldview. That is, we believe that the unbelievers begin from false first principles, and then by defective processes of reasoning, they have constructed their thoroughly irrational worldviews. This irrationality pervades even the smallest and most insignificant aspects of their belief systems, so that we indeed believe that every detail in their worldviews are subject to challenge and refutation.

Since unbelievers seem unaware of this and would even deny it, and since they in fact believe that they are the rational and intellectually superior ones, then it follows that in the process of destroying their pride and delusion, we should expose their pervasive irrationality. In addition, since the unbelievers often accuse us of being irrational, surely they may not protest when we hold *them* to a standard of strict rationality and sound logic.

Rather than impeding any real progress, this approach uncovers problems as they occur, and thus it prevents any false progress that might collapse later on in the conversation. Any irrationality – any false definition, unstated premise, unjustified assumption, invalid inference – left unnoticed or unchallenged in the course of debate might arise later to cause problems and confusions, and all the while the unbeliever unjustifiably retains his intellectual pride and sense of superiority. Most non-Christians never had their most basic beliefs and assumptions challenged – really challenged – and they walk away from each debate thinking that, even if they failed to refute Christianity, at least their own beliefs are intact.⁷

The basic skill required to apply the above principle is the ability to reconstruct and examine arguments. In other words, you must mentally rearrange everything that your opponent says into a syllogism and then examine it. Since people seldom speak in complete syllogisms, there will often be missing premises in the reconstructed syllogism. This in itself does not indicate a logical fallacy, but you ought to discover these missing premises, and then examine them.

You examine a syllogism by asking relevant questions about it: What does each word in this syllogism mean? Is each word used consistently throughout, or does it commit the fallacy of equivocation? Are there any missing premises? What are they? Where do they come from? Are these missing premises true and defensible? How does my opponent know that these premises are true? How does he infer from these premises to the

⁷ The unbeliever might object to our approach of challenging everything about his beliefs and statements, but this very objection is one of the things that we should challenge. Not every objection is rational, and we challenge the unbeliever to defend his questions and objections.

conclusion? Is the inference logically valid and necessary? Does this argument commit any informal fallacies?

Of course, even beginning Christian apologists know about syllogisms and fallacies, but even seasoned apologists do not subject *everything* that their opponents say to such a logical analysis. When you do, you will notice that *everything* that your opponent says is indeed fatally flawed.

You might be tempted to think that something that seems so tedious applies only to the major points that the opponent makes, to be performed only several times at the most in each debate. But I am saying that you must seize every opportunity to expose your opponent's foolishness, showing that he is altogether irrational.

Our contention is not only that the unbelievers affirm irrational *conclusions*, but that he is pervasively irrational. He is irrational at *every* point in his thinking, not only at the major points, and you must bring this out to demonstrate his pervasive irrationality. Besides, it is the seemingly minor points that lead to the major ones, and if you will challenge him on the minor points, he will never get the chance to build up to the major ones in the first place, that is, unless you allow him to continue for the sake of argument.

In any case, the more skilled that you become in reconstructing and examining arguments, the more natural, accurate, and thorough you will become in performing the analysis. At first, your mind might not be quick enough to capture all of your opponent's statements and arguments, but when this way of thinking becomes an intellectual reflex or habit, you will be able to reconstruct and examine every statement uttered during the course of a debate or discussion as it happens.

This is how I think all the time when discussing theology or performing apologetics. Every statement that I read or hear is immediately rearranged into syllogistic form, and all the words, definitions, premises, assumptions, and inferences are examined. I also write and speak this way. I am always aware of my premises, inferences, and conclusions. Of course, I do not always state all my premises or make all my inferences explicit, but I am aware of them, and I know how to defend them if called upon to do so. Some of my more observant readers may notice that many of my paragraphs read like extended syllogisms, and sometimes whole sections of my writings consist of a series of these extended syllogisms.

Proficient and constant syllogistic thinking is invaluable to both defense and offense in apologetics. Of course, I do not claim to have achieved perfect rationality, but to the extent that I have patterned my own thinking after God's perfect rationality, my thinking is precise and correct, and even my own imperfect reflection of God's perfect rationality makes me invincible in debate, because even the foolishness of God is greater than man's wisdom. The Scripture itself explicitly uses syllogistic thinking in many places. This is because the syllogism is God's idea. Whether we are doing it explicitly or implicitly, when we think syllogistically using premises supplied by biblical propositions, we have the mind of Christ.

When you learn to think this way – syllogistically and rationally – you will notice that the non-Christians are, to put it mildly, incredibly lazy in formulating their questions and objections, and that in *every* instance, they do not really know what they are asking at all. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that *none* of their statements can be logically understood.

Let me give you an example. One of the most popular objections against Christianity is the so-called "problem of evil," and when an unbeliever brings it up during the course of debate, he might say something like, "If God is all-powerful and all-loving, then why is there so much evil in this world?" Most Christians assume that they know what the unbeliever means by this, and that the unbeliever means by it what they think he means by it, and then they proceed to answer the objection. But do we really know what he means? Does *he* know what he means?

As it stands, this is not even an objection, but a question. Yes, the objection is implied, but what is it? An objection against Christianity must be an argument reducible to a syllogism with a conclusion that contradicts Christianity. That is, it must contain true premises and necessarily lead to a conclusion like, "Therefore, Christianity is false," or "Therefore, the Christian God does not exist." In this case, what exactly is the objection? What are these true premises? What is the exact process of reasoning that necessarily leads to the conclusion that Christianity is false or that God does not exist?

You should not just assume your own answers to these questions as if the unbeliever has explicitly stated them. Instead of doing all the work for him, make him do his own work. Demand that he makes his argument explicit and complete, asking him the relevant questions every step of the way. As with *every* objection that non-Christians make against Christianity, when you skillfully perform this analysis and challenge, you will find that the problem of evil cannot be logically formulated. If it cannot be logically formulated, then there is no objection for you to answer.

It would be a mistake to say that we are thus avoiding the objection, because the unbeliever cannot rationally insist that there is an objection at all, when he himself does not know what he is asking, and when we have no rational way of understanding the challenge. The unbeliever boasts so much about his rationality, so he has no right to whine when rational analysis crushes his objection.

Nevertheless, Scripture does explain the existence of evil, and if we will pretend that the question can be formulated at all, it does explain how the existence of God is consistent with the existence of evil. But we must not uncritically accept the unbeliever's objection. He thinks that his objection makes sense and is logically formulated, and this reinforces his pride in his intellectual capabilities. As mentioned, in apologetics we must not only defend ourselves against the challenges that arise from this intellectual pride, but we must

attack the pride itself. We must not only defend and present the wisdom of God, but we must also expose and destroy the pride of man, showing that he is in fact foolish.⁸

Another form of the problem of evil might refer to specific events that the unbeliever considers as problematic for or irreconcilable with biblical teachings. For example, there is the question, "Where was God on September 11th?"⁹ Many Christians assume that this question makes sense, that they know what the unbeliever means, and then they proceed to answer it. Now, I understand that we often use "shorthand" in our everyday speech, but I also understand what Scripture teaches about the foolishness and futility of the unbeliever's thinking, and therefore I know that he has no idea what he is asking by this question.

In the first place, what does he mean by "where"? God is not local or physical, so it makes no sense to say that he is at one place *instead* of another. So if the unbeliever is referring to a local or physical God, then his question has nothing to do with us. How do we know that this is *not* what the unbeliever means? We must ask him what he means. By "where," he is probably thinking about the relationship between God and the event, and specifically, whether God causes or allows evil and tragic events, and if so, how this is consistent with what Scripture teaches about God. This might be what he means, but you should not guide him like this outright. The unbeliever thinks he is intelligent and rational, so you should take every opportunity to show him that he is not – that he cannot even properly formulate a question is one indication that he is in fact stupid and irrational.

But then, even if he proceeds to ask how Scripture's teaching on God is consistent with the existence of evil, the question is still incomplete, for there is still no clear indication of any contradiction to be resolved. He has to include a premise asserting that the existence of God contradicts the existence of evil, and then he must say that since there is evil, the conclusion is that there is no God. But where does this premise come from? How does he know it? How does he know that it is true? Also, what does he mean by evil? Where does his definition come from? If his definition of God comes from inside the Bible, but his definition of evil comes from outside the Bible, then what does the objection have to do with us? If his definitions of both God and evil come from the Bible, then do God and evil *as defined by the Bible* contradict each other? The unbeliever must show it.

You must require your opponent to take responsibility for his objection. If he would make the objection, then he must stand behind it. Make him state all the premises in his objection explicitly; make him show that the premises are true, and that the conclusion necessarily follows from the premises. If he cannot do this, then he has not thought through his objection before using it against you. This makes him intellectually irresponsible, and it makes him an intellectual fraud, because his objection is a trick, and carries no substance. It makes him a hypocrite, because he accuses you of being

⁸ For a more detailed examination of the problem of evil, see Vincent Cheung, *The Light of Our Minds*, "The Problem of Evil."

⁹ I am referring to the terrorist attacks against the United States that happened on September 11, 2001.

irrational, but he cannot even rationally state a simple question or objection. The unbeliever takes pride in his intelligence; therefore, you must attack his intelligence, and show that he is stupid, and that he can do *nothing* right in debate.

Another example comes from the recent debate about homosexual marriage. Those who support homosexual marriage often say, "How does homosexual marriage hurt your marriage? How does it affect you?" The assumption is that homosexual marriage is wrong only if it hurts someone else. But where does this assumption come from? It requires a previous argument to establish. That is, there needs to be an argument with true premises that necessarily lead to the conclusion, "Therefore, homosexual marriage is wrong only if it hurts someone else." But as it stands, the question has no more logical force than, "What does homosexual marriage have to do with a ham sandwich?" Well, maybe nothing, but so what?

Many Christians tend to answer incomplete and irrational objections too soon (and the unbeliever's objections are *always* incomplete and irrational). In this case, they would immediately try to show how homosexual marriage does indeed hurt others, or they might affirm that homosexual marriage is wrong on another basis than that it hurts others. Either way, this allows the unbeliever to get away and continue with his laziness and irrationality. In apologetics, we must intellectually seize him by the throat and choke all the life out of his belief system.

Sometimes we would hear an unbeliever say something like, "Evolution has refuted Christianity," and then he would just stand there, smiling stupidly but triumphantly, waiting for your response. Admittedly, some unbelievers are at least superficially more precise and extensive than this, but even then the substance of what they say is never any better.

The statement as it stands is an unjustified assertion, not an argument. Logically speaking, this does not automatically mean that it is wrong, but it does mean that to answer it right away would be to miss a valuable (but not rare) opportunity – the opportunity to challenge the unbeliever's very way of thinking.

For this to become a rational objection against Christianity, the unbeliever needs to show his reasoning. First, he must establish the premise that evolution is true. Second, he must establish the premise that evolution contradicts Christianity. Then, he must show that these premises necessarily produce the conclusion that Christianity is false.

How about the objection that Christianity is too "close-minded"? Again, many believers immediately scramble to explain how Christianity is not close-minded. But are we to assume that the unbeliever's way of thinking is basically correct, and that he has simply misunderstood some aspects of Christianity? That is, are we to let him believe that his standard of judgment is indeed correct, that what is close-minded (or what seems close-minded to him) is also unacceptable?

The proposition, "Christianity is too close-minded," indeed implies an objection. But what is it? And what is the reasoning behind it? The unbeliever needs to do several things to make this into a real objection. First, he needs to rationally establish that what is close-minded is unacceptable.¹⁰ Second, he needs to establish that Christianity is indeed close-minded. Then, he needs to show that these two premises logically and inevitably lead to the conclusion that Christianity is unacceptable or false. Also, note that he needs to clearly define all the relevant words and expressions, and also establish his premises with valid arguments.

Of course, if we were to examine everything in the above examples, there are many others things that we can point out about each. For example, with the question on homosexual marriage, we may ask what the unbeliever means by "marriage," and ask him to justify his definition. Also, we may ask what he means by "hurting" or "affecting" someone. Does it count as hurting or affecting me if homosexual marriage annoys or even angers me? Or does he have some other kind of damage in mind? He must define and defend his standard, and of course, we will also similarly criticize his definition and defense.

But I do not want to get stuck in examining examples. Because there are an infinite number of possible examples, the important thing is that you learn the way of thinking that I am talking about, and not just how to answer particular questions and objections. Besides, in my other writings, I have already answered many specific questions and objections. You can look to them for additional examples, including more detailed examination of some of the above topics.

The following is a fictitious dialogue between Vincent, Nathan, and Sam. This hurriedly drafted dialogue is only a teaching tool – it does not represent *exactly* what a non-Christian might say under a similar context, neither does it demonstrate all that I would do (and want you to do) in a conversation or informal debate about Christianity. In addition, the dialogue resolves none of the issues that are brought up in it. Again, my purpose is to teach a certain way of thinking, a biblical mindset that can adapt to any debate situation, and not just words to memorize.

Nathan: Vincent! Do you remember me? We met at Tommy's wedding last year. How are you doing?

Vincent: I am doing fine, thank you. Yes, of course I remember you.

N: This is Sam, my brother.

V: Hi, Sam.

Sam: Hello.

¹⁰ But is the claim that what is close-minded is also *false*?

N: What are you reading?

V: I am reading William Shedd's *Dogmatic Theology*.

N: Is that a Christian book?

V: Yes, it's a thoughtful work on a fascinating subject.

N: I can never be a Christian.

V: Oh, you think so? Why is that?

N: Well, I don't want to offend you, but I think that Christianity is too irrational, and I just can't accept it.

V: If you have some time to talk, we can find out just what you know about Christianity in a moment. But for now, what do you believe? How do you decide what is true and what is false? How do you view reality? If you refuse to accept what you consider as irrational, have you found something rational that you can believe?

N: Yes, I believe that science is a rational and reliable way of discovering true information about reality, and therefore I believe in science.

V: Let me see if I understand you correctly. You said that you are willing to believe only that which is rational, and science is rational, while Christianity is not; therefore, you believe in science.

N: Yes, that is what I mean.

V: But what is rationality? And what is science?

N: What do you mean?

V: You said that you will only believe in what is rational, and science is rational. If I am going to interact with your view, I must understand what you mean by rationality, what you mean by science, and why you think that science is rational.

N: I haven't thought much about this before, but your question is not difficult to answer. A rational belief is a belief that is based on sound evidence and reality, on facts and a verification of facts. Science is a way of interacting with the world that takes these things into account. For example, science employs experimentation to test its hypotheses.

V: Your response is already more careful than most non-Christians, but it is still not nearly enough.

N: How so?

V: There are still too many unanswered questions. What is evidence? What is reality? What is a fact? You tell me that science involves experimentation, but why is experimentation a rational way of discovering true information about reality? When you say that you believe in science and in experimentation, do you mean that you use the scientific method yourself to discover all that you think you know about reality? Or, do you believe what scientists tell you that they have discovered by the scientific method? In that case, are you really believing in science, or in the testimony of scientists?

N: So many questions!

V: I am not asking these questions just for the sake of asking them, nor am I trying to distract you with irrelevant questions, but you claimed to be rational, and now you must back up your claim with a rational defense of your beliefs. But I am not done yet. I suppose you would agree that rationality has to do with logic and valid reasoning, and by saying that Christianity is irrational, you also mean that Christianity is illogical and that it involves invalid reasoning. Is that an accurate way of putting it?

N: Yes, I suppose, but what you are getting at?

V: If you claim to be rational, then I ask that you *really* be rational. That is, I ask that you reason in a valid manner, following the strict laws of logic.

N: I have no problem with that. I think that this is what science does.

V: Well, remember that you still have not answered my previous questions, so it seems that you already have a problem. Since you think that science is so rational, then please tell me *one* example of a rational conclusion arrived at by the scientific method in all the history of science. Now, before you reply, note that a rational conclusion about reality would be a proposition about reality that has been necessarily deduced from true premises. This is just simple logic. What are these true premises in your example? How did you find out about them? How do you know that they are true?

Does the procedure involve deriving any knowledge from sensation? If so, please explain how knowledge can *rationally* come from sensation. Any rational belief can be written out as a proposition, so please write out the entire process of how a sensation rationally becomes a proposition in the mind. If science is rational, and if your belief in science is so rational, then surely you can easily answer me.

(Later in the conversation...)

N: Now that we have moved on to talk about the nature of God, I have an objection related to this topic that no Christian, at least none that I have talked to, seem to be able to answer in a rational way. Sometimes they throw in a bunch of theological words, and then finally say that it's all a mystery. Instead of vindicating Christianity, what they say only reinforces my belief that this religion is irrational. Maybe you can answer it?

V: Wow, it sounds like a difficult question, but try me.

N: All right. If God is absolutely sovereign as Christianity teaches, then that would make him the author of sin.

V: So what?

N: So what?! You don't see the problem? Whenever I said this to a Christian, he would scramble to deny it, and then give me some kind of contorted explanation that seems to contradict what he had just told me about the nature of God.

V: Well, I would be happy to respond if you can tell me what the problem is.

N: I am surprised that you don't see it. If God is sovereign, then that would make him the author of sin, but if God is the author of sin, then that would contradict what Scripture teaches about him.

V: Really? How? I would remind you that I have yet to affirm or deny that God is the author of sin. At this point, you haven't even stated the problem. How do you establish the premise, "God cannot be the author of sin"?

N: If God is the author of sin, that would make him unrighteous!

V: But how? What is righteousness and unrighteousness? And by the way, what is the meaning of "author"? And what is the meaning of "sin" in your challenge?

N: I haven't considered all these details before.

V: But you need to. Let me tell you what you must do to make this a real and rational objection. First, you must establish the premise that for God to be sovereign would make him the author of sin. Second, you must establish the premise that for God to be the author of sin would contradict biblical teaching, or Christianity. Then, you must establish that these two premises necessarily produce the conclusion that Christianity is false. Note that you must provide a valid argument for each of your premises in order to establish them. Also, you must have coherent and relevant definitions for all the words and expressions involved, such as "God," "sovereign," "author," and "sin." If you fail to do any of this, then there is logically no objection for me to answer. Now, if you have never considered these necessary questions, then it seems that you are not nearly as rational as you thought, and it seems hypocritical for you to say that Christianity is irrational.¹¹

(Later in the conversation...)

Sam: You see, Nathan, this is what I have been telling you all along. It is futile to argue with him and let logic decide the issue.

V: So you don't believe in logic?

S: No, I don't believe in logic.

V: Great, so that means you do believe in logic.

S: What are you saying? I just told you that I don't.

V: What? Your mother is a cow? What makes you say a thing like that?

S: I did not say that, my mother is not a cow.

V: What? Your father is a criminal and your sister is a whore? Hey, I don't need to know all that.

S: Stop insulting my family!

¹¹ For additional remarks on the "author of sin" question, see Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Ephesians*.

V: I am not insulting your family, you are.

S: You are not making any sense!

V: Am I supposed to make sense? Logic affirms that A cannot be non-A at the same time and in the same sense. Since you don't believe in logic, then "I don't believe in logic" can just as easily mean "I *do* believe in logic," "My mother is a cow," "My father is a criminal," or "My sister is a whore." Now, do you believe in logic or not? If you do believe in logic, then you must succeed where Nathan failed; if you don't believe in logic, then you do believe in logic – and your mother is a cow.

The unbeliever's objection cannot be logically understood and then answered unless we first know its meaning and reasoning, but when we press for definitions and clarifications, the objection itself is destroyed. This happens with every non-Christian objection, so that logically speaking, the non-Christian really cannot ask us anything, or challenge us about anything. He thinks he is smarter, but he cannot even formulate an intelligible question or objection. He is the fool, the idiot, and this is what biblical apologetics shows – that any godless person is a complete buffoon.

Of course, this does not mean that we should never defend the truth and coherence of our own beliefs. In fact, as we will discuss in the next chapter, we should present and defend our beliefs just as thoroughly as we destroy our opponent's beliefs. So we are indeed not trying to evade the questions and objections; the problem is that none of the questions and objections from non-Christians makes any sense. They do not rationally understand and present their questions and objections; instead, they blindly point and shoot, and if they miss, they shoot again, and again, and again. They can often safely take this approach because the Christians never make them account for their own beliefs and the rational basis for their very questions and objections.

Therefore, besides defending the truth and coherence of our faith, we must also expose that fact that all of their thinking is careless, foolish, irrational, and unjustified. For example, with the problem of evil, of course we can and should tell our opponents about God's relationship with evil, but we do this not because the logic of their objection demands it (since the objection makes no sense), but because God has called us to preach the gospel and teach all nations.

The unbeliever does not know or admit that everything he says is foolish and irrational; instead, he believes that he is thoroughly intelligent and rational. You must destroy this self-deception by attacking everything that he says and believes. To do this, you must learn to listen carefully and then to think syllogistically, keeping track of as many logical problems as you are mentally capable. Then, launch an all-out assault. Ask "Why?"; ask "So what?"; ask "How do you know?" Challenge every definition; require every assumed premise to be explicitly stated and defended; question every inference concerning its logical validity and necessity; expose every irrational move, every leap in logic.

If the unbeliever's worldview is truly rational, then he should have no problem answering us; in fact, he should have already gone through the same rational analysis when he adopted his current beliefs. We are convinced that just as God has rendered all non-Christian thinking foolish and futile, every non-Christian will fall under rational pressure, for the Reason of God is against him, and he has no defense against our attacks.

The Christian apologist has divine weapons from God to defeat any non-Christian, but to effectively wield them and to accomplish his mission, he must be willing, decisive, precise, and thorough. Instead of regarding apologetics as only defense, as only answering questions and making clarifications, he must endlessly attack all non-Christian thinking with the overwhelming force of Logic (*logos*, John 1:1).

3. ARRANGE THE CLASH

ACTS 17:22-31

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."¹²

Scripture says that God has made human wisdom foolish and futile; it is "in the wisdom of God" that "the world through *its* wisdom did not know him" (1 Corinthians 1:21). In other words, it is by God's deliberate decree and design that human wisdom will never attain knowledge about ultimate reality (God) and that it will never attain salvation on its own. Since all of reality is inseparably connected to and sustained by the ultimate reality (God), and since every man will perish in hell without salvation through Christ, this means that every non-Christian worldview, philosophy, or religion can never attain any true knowledge about reality, nor can it produce any true meaning, purpose, or result in life.

Thus we say that God has made all human wisdom both foolish and futile. And since every non-Christian, by the very fact that he is a non-Christian, embraces and trusts human wisdom in his thinking, this means that every non-Christian is foolish and futile. Unless God sovereignly converts them, every one of them is stupid and useless. As Scripture says, "All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Romans 3:12).

¹² For a detailed exposition of this passage and how it relates to biblical apologetics, see Vincent Cheung, *Presuppositional Confrontations*.

All Christians agree with me on this – that is, agree with the Scripture – in principle, but when I actually say it, many of them disown me. This is because they are embarrassed about God, and about what he explicitly teaches in Scripture; they either do not want me to repeat what it teaches, or they want me to dilute it so much that nobody knows what I really mean. But I am not ashamed of what Scripture teaches, and I refuse to accommodate spineless wimps who claim to be Christians.

Therefore, I will repeat, all non-Christians are stupid, sinful, and worthless, as Scripture teaches. Even as Christians, all our wisdom, holiness, and worth come from God, and not from ourselves, so that without him, we are nothing and can do nothing (John 15:5). I stress this not just for the sake of insulting non-Christians, and not just because it makes me happy to say it; rather, I am trying to tell you about the reality of the situation, a reality that carries important implications for apologetics. We have already discussed one of these implications earlier, namely, that because human wisdom is foolish and futile, as long as we depend on divine wisdom in our apologetics, we will always win in any debate against any unbeliever.

Another important implication is that, since human wisdom is foolish and futile – since it is absurd and barren – in doing apologetics, we must not begin with and then build upon human wisdom in the attempt to produce knowledge about reality or intellectual fruit. Therefore, the biblical apologist does not try to merely redirect human wisdom to a conclusion that concurs with divine wisdom; rather, he arranges an all-out clash between human wisdom and divine wisdom, and as a result, he crushes human wisdom by divine wisdom, and also vindicates divine wisdom in the process.

Broadly speaking, this is the essence of my method: I cut down human pride and lift up divine wisdom, and I crush human speculation by divine revelation. No, I am not saying that I would set the two opposing viewpoints next to each other and let people choose which one is more "attractive." I am not advocating comparative apologetics, but confrontational apologetics.

Although comparative apologetics has its purpose, only confrontational apologetics can truly vindicate the faith and crush the opponent in debate. One reason for this is because showing that two worldviews are different does not automatically show that one is true and the other false. Another reason is that reprobates will always be more attracted to the non-biblical worldview anyway (1 Corinthians 1:18, 22-23), because of their stupid and sinful thinking.

Instead, what I am saying is that the biblical worldview consists of a set of revealed doctrines that provide (1) a positive and comprehensive philosophy that is true and coherent (and therefore logically defensible), and (2) a way of thinking that rationally crushes our opponents. The way to victory, then, is to skillfully apply the biblical worldview to the intellectual challenges and opportunities that arise during the debate.

The method is to confront human wisdom with divine wisdom, and since even the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of man, I will never lose in debate, but I will always obtain a total and decisive victory. If you will learn how to arrange, maintain, and pursue a clash between human wisdom and divine wisdom, then you can also have this assurance of victory. Thus in this chapter, we will discuss some principles and guidelines on how to arrange such a clash.

The biblical approach to apologetics is to confront human wisdom with divine wisdom, and to crush human wisdom and vindicate divine wisdom. You do this by arranging a clash between the biblical worldview and the non-biblical worldview. This in turn means that during your debate or discussion with an unbeliever, you must present at least all the major elements of the biblical worldview, and you must interact with all the major elements of the non-biblical worldview espoused by your opponent.

If you are successful in doing this, several things will happen. You will make clear that the two worldviews contradict each other at every major point. If the first principles of two worldviews oppose each other, then everything that is deduced from these opposing principles will necessarily oppose each other also. Since you know that the first principles of your worldview oppose the first principles of your opponent's worldview,¹³ this means that you will also logically disagree with your opponent on even every minor issue. Even if you appear to agree with your opponent on something, it is a purely superficial agreement, and an agreement that would be destroyed once each discusses what he truly means and the reasons for his position.

Since the two worldviews oppose each other at every point, it follows that each worldview must then stand on its own intellectual merits and resources. In other words, each worldview can contain only principles and propositions that are validly deduced from a self-authenticating first principle; it may not borrow principles and propositions available in another worldview that is not deducible from its own first principle.

For example, if a non-biblical principle cannot rationally stand on its own, and then by valid deduction produce an ethical principle against murder, then this non-biblical worldview (and its adherents) cannot rationally affirm an ethical principle against murder. Better yet, if a non-biblical principle cannot rationally stand on its own, and then by valid deduction produce a theory of knowledge, then this non-biblical worldview (and its adherents) cannot rationally claim to know *anything* at all. And if an adherent of this non-biblical worldview cannot rationally claim to know anything at all, then it necessarily follows that he can have no intellectual basis or resource by which to question or attack Christianity.

Of course, the implication is that to be able to rationally question or attack anything, one must already have a true and coherent worldview. If the person cannot defend his own worldview at the same time that he is attacking another, then all his questions and

¹³ If the first principles of your worldview and your opponent's worldview in fact agree, then this means that either you are really a non-Christian like your opponent, or your opponent is really a Christian like you, and that the whole debate is really a big misunderstanding.

objections are just the meaningless rantings of a lunatic. Your non-Christian opponent is precisely this, and this is one of the things that you should show in performing biblical apologetics.

On the other hand, this also means that you must not borrow non-biblical principles, propositions, and presuppositions in constructing your own worldview and formulating your own arguments. Rationally, there is no need to do this anyway, since biblical principles are sufficient to sustain a true, comprehensive, and coherent worldview. In fact, since the biblical worldview is the only true view of reality, to mix into it non-biblical worldview would only generate confusion and weaken your arguments.

For example, you will only introduce unnecessary inconsistencies into your worldview if you hold to any degree or any kind of empiricism. Likewise, since Arminianism is unbiblical, to affirm any degree or any form of Arminianism (including human free will) would only generate irresolvable problems in your worldview (that is, at all the points where Arminianism contradicts Scripture), which your opponent might then discover and attack. It would then appear to those who do not know better that he has found inconsistencies in the biblical worldview, when you are not holding to a truly biblical worldview at all. Rather than sharing these unbiblical beliefs, you should be attacking them by biblical apologetics.

In any case, by showing that the two worldviews contradict each other at every point, you also show that they cannot coexist. Since the biblical worldview and the non-biblical worldview contradict each other, it also means that they cannot both be true, but where one is true, the other must be false. This in turn means that when you are defending the Christian worldview, you are at the same time also attacking the non-Christian worldview, and when you are attacking the non-Christian worldview, you are also defending the Christian worldview.¹⁴

This insight is important not only in *winning* the debate, but in *starting* and *sustaining* the debate, that is, in stirring up intellectual conflict (remember, we *want* the worldviews to clash). To give a simple example, someone might say to you, "I believe that all religions are good, and that all of them are true, only that they describe things from different perspectives." On the surface, this statement seems to affirm that Christianity is also good and true; however, since Christianity affirms that it is the *only* good and true worldview, this person's statement contradicts Christianity and is therefore actually an attack against Christianity. On the other hand, as you then present and defend the exclusivity of Christianity, you are logically also attacking this person's statement, which is a part of his worldview.

Therefore, from this seemingly innocent and even complimentary statement (although it does not seem this way to me), the biblical apologist can ignite the clash between his

¹⁴ We can view the situation this way because we already know that the biblical worldview is true, and this fact is fixed in our minds when we discuss apologetics. Otherwise, two worldviews that contradict each other can both be false (as when two non-biblical worldviews clash against each other), and when using our method, they would both be destroyed.

biblical worldview and his opponent's non-biblical worldview. The same applies to a situation when the non-Christian, without abandoning his beliefs, says, "You are *also* right." But the Christian can never be satisfied with anything less than the opponent's admission, "I am wrong, you are right – Christianity is true, and all non-Christian worldviews are false." To say that Christianity is *also* right is the logical equivalent of saying that Christianity is wrong, since Christianity itself claims to be *exclusively* right.

Again, by presenting the entire biblical worldview during the course of debate, and by interacting with the entire non-biblical worldview of your opponent, you logically force each worldview to stand on its own, exposing all of its strengths, weaknesses, dependencies, and internal and external relationships. You will then not only show that the non-Christian is wrong on a very specific claim about a very narrow issue (so that the rest of his worldview is still intact), but you will show that he is fundamentally and comprehensively wrong on *everything*, and that you are fundamentally and comprehensively right on *everything* (insofar as your beliefs correspond to biblical teachings).

You will vindicate Christianity as a worldview, as a complete belief system, only if you present and defend it as a worldview, and you will demolish your opponent's worldview only if you attack it as a worldview. The more comprehensive the clash, the more decisive your victory, and the more complete his destruction.

In formal debate, a significant part of the clash would be meticulously planned. This is because although there are still some unscripted interactions and occasional surprises, it remains that the format permits and demands much prior preparation, and that certain portions of the presentation from each side are quite fixed. Each person is allotted a set amount of time to present his arguments and refutations without interruption. This alone makes formal debate very different from informal debate.

For example, in a formal debate, you may not immediately challenge a false premise that your opponent uses in his argument, but you must wait your turn; meanwhile, the opponent is allowed to weave this false premise into his overall argument or presentation. If this overall argument or presentation sounds convincing to the audience (even if illegitimately so), then this might generate a psychological effect in the audience to favor your opponent. After this, even a pointed refutation of that false premise might not fully overcome this favorable disposition toward your opponent, even if refuting the false premise causes your opponent's case to logically fall apart.¹⁵ Of course, to put it mildly, this acknowledges the fact that members of the audience are usually not altogether rational.

In addition, since formal debates are prearranged, since each side knows who their opponent would be, and since each side knows precisely what is to be debated, not only does each side possess ample time to prepare his own positive case in advance, but he can

¹⁵ One way to neutralize this effect is to directly mention what your opponent is doing, and point out that he has failed to compose a valid argument, so that any rational person should not accept it.

also try to research his opponent's beliefs and arguments in detail, and prepare his refutation in advance.

On the other hand, in informal debate – a debate that has no strictly enforced rules, time limitations, moderators, judges, etc., as in two people debating religion in a personal conversation over dinner – is more fluid, less structured, and thus often a bit chaotic. Although some aspects of it can still be planned and anticipated, many aspects of an informal debate are less predictable than a formal debate. For example, although you may still prepare a short presentation of your worldview to be used whenever an informal debate occurs, or to be used for a specific informal debate that you expect to occur, there is no guarantee that you will be permitted to give your entire presentation without interruption from your opponent, or even from one of the bystanders. In fact, in an informal setting, one or more of the interested bystanders might end up becoming active participants, in which case you might have to engage more than one person at the same time. This problem does not exist in formal debate.

Using the same example cited for formal debate, we note another difference when the opponent utters a false premise in the course of trying to establish his case. Since personal conversations often consist of relatively short turns by each side, instead of extended discourses, it is possible to immediately challenge your opponent when he attempts to use a false or unjustified premise. For example, upon hearing a questionable premise, it is possible to immediately respond, "Yes, I want to hear your entire argument, but before you continue, how do you know what you just said is true? It seems to be a crucial premise to your argument, but I disagree with it, and if it is false, then your conclusion cannot be true, so please provide me with some rational justification for this premise."

In fact, logically speaking, in an informal debate you can prevent your opponent from making any progress at all unless he rationally establishes the premises necessary for his argument. Alternatively, you can also register your disagreement to his false premise and still allow him to finish his presentation. Socially speaking, this may be a matter of courtesy. Strategically speaking, this will produce a larger target for you to attack – the more he talks, the more evidence that you can gather to document his foolish and irrational thinking. You can kill the argument at the start, or let him exhibit more of his foolishness so that you can blow up the whole thing. The point is that if you can logically (and thus legitimately) stop him anywhere, it means that you have a choice of whether to stop him at any particular point, for any social or strategic reason.

Of course, your opponent might also challenge one or more of your premises while you present your worldview. This move from your opponent might at least temporarily redirect the conversation, since you might have to first defend the premise that you had just uttered (but remember what we said in the previous chapter, that since every statement from your opponent is foolish and irrational, you can also take every question or objection as a springboard for an all-out attack), and then return to finish your argument later, unless you managed to drive the redirected conversation to arrive at your conclusion by another logical path.

In addition, in an informal debate, although it is often possible to prepare a general refutation of your opponent's beliefs, it is often impossible to prepare a precise refutation beforehand. This is because each unbeliever's exact beliefs are unique. The fact that all non-Christians are foolish and irrational makes their beliefs that much more arbitrary, and that many of them are without a public and formal creed makes their beliefs that much more diverse. Of course, even those with such creeds do not necessarily adhere to them. This problem is especially pronounced if the opponent is a complete stranger who affirms highly specific and peculiar beliefs, or if he himself is not clear on what he believes, as is often the case. In a formal debate, it is often possible to prepare a relatively precise refutation beforehand, especially if you have access to the opponent's published writings, or if he has endorsed the published writings of others.

The point is that some of the principles and practices valuable to performing well in one kind of debate cannot be applied to the other kind, since the two formats are so different. Therefore, one who knows how to arrange the clash in a formal debate might not know how to do it in an informal debate, and vice versa. In any case, biblical apologetics is easily adapted to both formal and informal debate; that is, the biblical approach to apologetics enables the believer to fully resolve the difficulties that each format presents, and to fully exploit the opportunities that each format offers. Although there is much more to say about the formal debate, since most people will never engage in it, and since it is not our stated subject anyway, I mention it only to contrast it with the informal debate, which we will now further discuss.

Whether in a formal debate or an informal debate, remember that you must arrange for entire worldviews to clash, and not just several very specific and narrow ideas within these worldviews. In formal debate, time is allotted for you to use as you please, so that even if there is insufficient time to exhaustively deal with each worldview, it is at least possible to briefly bring out many of the major ideas. In contrast, what happens in an informal debate is not completely controlled by either party, and you are not given uninterrupted time to use as you please; therefore, you have to find some other way to ensure a comprehensive clash of the worldviews. This is not to say that formal debates are better at dealing with entire worldviews than informal debates, since many informal debates are better in that they often last much longer than formal debates. For example, two friends may discuss and debate religious matters over coffee, lunch, and dinner for many hours over a matter of weeks.

To make entire worldviews clash in informal debates, you must understand and exploit the nature of worldviews. A worldview is a system of thought explicitly and implicitly consisting of all the propositions that its adherent affirms. Each proposition, however minor or specific, is logically preceded by the foundational propositions of the system. And since it is the foundational propositions that logically produced all the subsidiary propositions within the system, this in turn means that every proposition is logically related to every other proposition in the system.

To use an analogy, although I did not give birth to my brother and my brother did not give birth to me, we are nevertheless related because we share the same parents. Every child has parents, and since the parents are also the parents of all those to whom they give birth, every child is also related to every other child of his parents; that is, every child is related to his parents, and to all his siblings through his parents. In a similar way, every proposition within every worldview is logically related to the foundational propositions of the worldview, and to every other proposition within the worldview, through the foundational propositions of the worldview.

Now, if a subsidiary proposition logically requires a given foundational proposition, but this foundational proposition is inconsistent with another subsidiary proposition within a person's belief system, then you have just discovered a bastard proposition, or an inconsistency in his worldview. You then have legitimate reason to challenge his rationality, or to set off a logical chain reaction that would destroy the rational justification for every proposition in his worldview.

But we are getting slightly ahead of ourselves. For now, the emphasis is that every proposition is logically related to every other proposition in a worldview. This has tremendous ramifications for informal debate. It means that no matter from which proposition within a worldview that the debate begins, it is always logically possible to end up covering all the other areas within this worldview. And since every major area of a worldview has its counterpart in every other worldview,¹⁶ it logically matters little whether the debate begins from a proposition in your worldview or in your opponent's worldview. If the debate starts at all, then both parties have logically committed their entire worldviews into the conflict, and not just the proposition that started it.

Although I think that it is philosophically most convenient to start from the foundational propositions within a worldview, most informal debates will begin from a disagreement over a specific subsidiary proposition within the worldview of one of the participants. For example, the debate might begin because of a disagreement over what one of the participants says about the death penalty. Debate over this issue logically entails discussion about evil, justice, and mercy. This logically entails a broader discussion about ethics, which in turn necessitates discussions about epistemology and metaphysics. Once the debate has arrived at this foundational level,¹⁷ it is easy and natural to drive the discussion over to areas like history, science, religion, education – and every other area in each worldview.

To do all of this, however, the biblical apologist must perceive the logical connection between propositions, and then to logically, naturally, and fairly direct the debate so that it covers every major aspect of each worldview. This agenda is *not* something that we must hide from our opponents, since it is by no means a trick – a true and coherent worldview can appear that much more true and coherent the more comprehensively it is

¹⁶ For example, every worldview entails a specific view on metaphysics and epistemology.

¹⁷ Although here I describe several steps before arriving at the foundational propositions, the relationship of every subsidiary proposition within a worldview is in fact such that, if you choose, you can always immediately drive the conversation to the foundational level.

presented. Confident of his own rationality, the unbeliever should have no problem with a comprehensive worldview analysis. By the same token, a false, foolish, inconsistent, and irrational worldview can only appear that much more absurd and impossible the more completely we investigate it. In addition, we are by no means trying to ignore or avoid the very issue that started the debate – unless the debate begins from the very foundational propositions themselves, whatever started it must be discussed in the light of prior presuppositions and reasonings from those presuppositions.

In other words, you are trying to show your opponent the blueprint of your worldview, your noetic structure, and challenge him to destroy your intellectual edifice; and you are trying to obtain the blueprint of his worldview, so that you can strategically and completely demolish all the contents and patterns of his thinking, even the very foundational principles of his beliefs. Of course, this is just an analogy, and it does not mean that you have to complete one phase of this project before you begin the other. It is especially true that in an informal debate, you will probably be performing both tasks at the same time.

Because an essential part of this procedure involves presenting your own worldview and accepting an attack on it, it is imperative that you possess an accurate, precise, and comprehensive knowledge of the biblical worldview. You must understand what Scripture teaches concerning every major theological and philosophical topic.¹⁸ You must perceive all the logical relations between these biblical doctrines. You must know how to precisely present these teachings, and how to rationally defend them. You must understand why the biblical worldview can withstand the very same questions and challenges that will destroy any non-biblical worldview.

Since my method is the biblical method, I boldly claim that it is invincible, but I never said that you can be lazy. The approach consists of a body of knowledge and a way of thinking, so that you must thoroughly absorb this body of knowledge and completely adopt this way of thinking. Therefore, the single most important thing that you can do to become a better apologist is to master systematic theology, for by it you perceive and understand the whole of Scripture as a coherent system of thought.

Again, we do not sharply separate the informal debate into a defense phase and an attack phase. Not only is this because informal debates are not as rigidly organized as formal debates, but as mentioned earlier, as you continue to show how the biblical worldview contradicts the non-biblical worldview on everything, it becomes obvious that if you are right, then your opponent is wrong. Therefore, every defense of your worldview becomes an attack on your opponent's worldview, and every attack on your opponent's worldview becomes a defense of your worldview. In addition, we have said that *everything* that the non-Christian says is nonsense, and this means that *every* statement that he utters to attack your worldview is itself subject to your attack.

Sometimes people ask me what they should do if the opponent tries to use the same method against the biblical worldview that we use against the non-biblical worldview.

¹⁸ See Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology, Ultimate Questions, and Presuppositional Confrontations*.

The question implies a basic misunderstanding of biblical apologetics. It is not the method as such, but it is the content of our worldview that gives us the victory in debate. Winning by method or skill alone would be intellectual sophistry. Our method is just a way of arranging the clash, exposing the differences, and making obvious the reality of the situation, that the biblical worldview is true, and that the non-biblical worldview is false. Therefore, we have nothing to fear from the unbelievers. In fact, we want them to imitate our method of strict rational argumentation and syllogistic analysis. This will help facilitate the process of completely presenting the contents of each worldview, and thus the vindication of the biblical worldview, and the destruction of the non-biblical worldview.

Besides knowing your own biblical worldview, you must also know your opponent's worldview, and this also requires some skill and effort. It is not as easy as just saying, "Please summarize for me all the major areas of your worldview, and the logical relations between them." Now, *you* should be able to respond to this inquiry, but most unbelievers cannot, since most unbelievers have never carefully considered and verbally formulated their beliefs. Therefore, you must usually do much of the work in understanding your opponent's worldview. You must ask questions, make inferences, take notes, draw graphs, listen, rephrase, clarify, and confirm.

You might think that if the opponent affirms a worldview that is associated with a public creed or if he affirms a popular worldview, then all you need is previous knowledge of this creed or worldview. For example, if your opponent is a Muslim, then it seems that you only need to know how to refute the Koran. Sometimes this is true, but it is often not that simple. This is because one who claims to be a Muslim does not always believe the Koran, or he may believe only parts of it. We may wonder whether this person can truly claim to be a Muslim, but it remains that we must still discover and address his personal beliefs.

You do this by starting from the topic or proposition that sparked the debate, and then from there reconstruct the opponent's worldview by asking questions, considering prior premises and assumptions, and the relationships between the various propositions. You must logically crawl through his entire belief system using the logical associations and relationships between his various beliefs, assertions, and arguments. You must eventually cover all the questions that every worldview must answer, especially in the areas of metaphysics and epistemology.

Whether you are confronting an opponent who affirms a worldview that is already familiar to you or one who affirms a worldview that you have never studied or encountered before, the basic procedure of mapping out his entire belief system is the same. Your ability to think syllogistically – to reconstruct every argument into a syllogism, and to place every seemingly isolated proposition within the context of a syllogism – will be just as valuable here when you seek to understand your opponent, as when you wish to attack him.

Since every statement that the non-Christian says is nonsense, at any point during the conversation, you have the option and the ability to destroy human pride and exalt divine wisdom, to demolish human speculation with divine revelation. In general, you should be doing this at every point of the debate, but sometimes you may wish to wait several turns in order to get a broader and deeper understanding of what your opponent is saying, before you trample the argument that he presents in this part of the conversation. This is a strategic concern, and your exact approach depends on the situation as well as your ability.

You should use the "take down" technique whenever there is the need, or whenever you consider it prudent to do so. Remember that the "take down" is useful not only when you wish to attack your opponent, but it can also attack the attack that comes from your opponent, and thus logically stopping the attack. In fact, it enables you to strategically freeze the debate at any point or on any issue for as long as you please or consider prudent. If your "take down" challenge is logically sound and coherently formulated, then of course it is a legitimate move in argumentation. Besides mastering systematic theology, the beginning apologist must master his "take down" skill.

It would be best if you have at least several hours to engage your opponent, but if not, you can still do much within half an hour. However, sometimes you only have several minutes to talk to someone about the Christian faith, as when the topic comes up as you speak to a stranger at the airport during transit. In such cases, you should take the time that you have to perform the "take down" several times. This challenges his own thinking, shakes his intellectual pride and security, and puts him in a position where he must find actual justification for his non-biblical beliefs (which we affirm is impossible), or embrace another non-biblical worldview (in which case he would still lack rational justification for his beliefs), or abandon non-biblical worldviews altogether to embrace Christianity.

Then, you must summarize for him the biblical worldview, covering all the major aspects of systematic theology, such as Scripture, God, Christ, man, salvation, judgment, and so forth. This supplies him with the intellectual contents that he must now embrace if God chooses to convert him. After the conversation has ended, you should pray that the God's will be done in his life, so that if the person is indeed one of God's elect, the Spirit of God would work in his thoughts and render effective what you have said. Of course, even if he is one of God's elect, God may not choose to convert him at this time; rather, God might make your words effective in his heart at a later time, or use additional instruments to work in his mind before finally converting him.

Whatever the case may be, you have done your duty if you have boldly challenged the human pride of your opponent and clearly presented the divine wisdom of Scripture. If you have done these two things, then you have preached the gospel to this person, and the gospel would be either the fragrance of life or the smell of death to him (2 Corinthians 2:16), depending on whether God has chosen him for salvation in eternity.

When it comes to apologetics, many Christians are interested in learning rigid techniques and memorizing prepared responses. So they try to summarize my method into a list of steps, and they often ask, "What do I say if they say this? And what do I say if they say that? But then, what if they say *this*?" Although memorized techniques and formulas have some limited use and effect, they give the believer a false sense of security. Then, what often happens is that, because the believer lacks understanding, he chokes and crumbles before an opponent who asks a question or makes an assertion that he has never considered, or who presents an objection that he has indeed encountered before, but this time stated in different words.

On the other hand, the biblical apologist finds security in the superiority of divine wisdom, not in rigid techniques and memorized formulas. He understands biblical teaching and sound reasoning, and therefore he can adapt to any intellectual opponent and any debate situation. His confidence, his sense of security, is not based on second-hand answers, but on the Rock, the divine *logos*, the Wisdom and Reason of God. Thus he is invincible in debate, because he has the mind of Christ.

4. ANNOUNCE THE OUTCOME

JOHN 8:43-47

"Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

Christians who faithfully affirm the biblical worldview and who skillfully apply the principles of biblical apologetics will always defeat non-Christians in debate. It seems that this ought to be the conclusion of the matter, and that there is little else to discuss, but another problem often comes up, namely, the unbelievers often do not know or admit that they have lost the debate.

This often stumps budding biblical apologists, including those who have already gained some proficiency in defeating the unbelievers in argumentation. After successfully engaging an opponent and roundly defeating him, it seems that the debate has reached a definite conclusion in favor of the biblical worldview, and that the unbeliever can produce no additional objections, but *still* he refuses to admit defeat.

Sometimes the unbeliever's failure to grasp what has happened does not result in an explicit refusal to admit defeat, but it may be expressed in other ways. For example, sometimes the unbeliever will suggest that we "start over" with the debate, and sometimes he will backtrack and morph his worldview into another form that now appears more defensible to him, and if you then defeat this new form, he will morph again.

Another unbeliever will suggest that we all "agree to disagree," and yet another one might try to comfort himself and obscure his defeat by saying that the two of you in fact do agree in your beliefs, and that the debate was just over a misunderstanding. Then, sometimes an unbeliever will just explicitly deny that he lost, or contrary to all indications, he might even claim that he won the debate. Of course, which tactic he uses often depends on what kind of worldview he affirms. For example, it is unlikely that an atheist will assert that his debate with you was over a mere misunderstanding; on the other hand, a Catholic or some other heretic might suggest this.

There are several reasons why an unbeliever may react this way to a defeat. First, most of them really never expect you to win, so that no matter how thoroughly you have defeated him, he will not interpret it as defeat. It simply does not occur to him that he has lost,

since to him it is impossible for you to win, although he is wrong in thinking this. Second, some of those who grant that it is possible for you to win the debate entertain this possibility only relative to how you would win by using *their* irrational non-biblical assumptions. In other words, even if it is possible for you to prove your conclusions right and his wrong, in his thinking you could and should do this only by reasoning more correctly than he does from *his* most basic assumptions. He never expects you to challenge those very assumptions and destroy them by logical analysis; therefore, he is bewildered and even angry when you do, and often he will fail to realize or accept what has just occurred.

The third reason is really a broad explanation that could include the first two; that is, consistent with what we have said about the thinking of the unbeliever, he is so foolish and irrational that he could not follow the progress of a rational debate. The non-Christian is as a stupid beast, so that he will often fail to perceive the rational force of your arguments and the logical rigor of your refutations. Whatever the case may be, what frustrates and irritates the biblical apologist is when the unbeliever appears completely oblivious to the fact that he has been exposed as a total imbecile by what has transpired during the conversation.

But is this the best that one can do? Is this the limit of biblical apologetics? Many who attempt to apply biblical apologetics often think that they cannot go any further at this point. The unbeliever has already been defeated, but he does not know it and refuses to admit it. However, to stop at this point is to fail to completely and consistently apply the principles of biblical apologetics. There is something more that you can do, or to be more precise, you can still do more of the same thing.

Now, we are assuming that although the unbeliever does not know what happened during the debate and as a result of the debate, you do know what happened. That is, whereas he fails to keep track of the logical progression of the arguments, refutations, and conclusions of the debate, you have been fully conscious of these things, and can retrace and summarize them. Assuming that you are intellectually aware of what happened, and you should be, then what you can do when the unbeliever is intellectually oblivious is to simply state that which is so obvious to you – since the unbeliever does not know what happened during the debate and as a result of the debate, you should just *tell him*.

I mentioned in a previous chapter that a believer who is trying to learn my method of apologetics would often perform quite well until the opponent brings up a question or an objection that, for some reason, causes the believer to stop applying the principles that have been serving him so well up to that point. That is, he suddenly thinks that the method does not apply to *this* question or objection, when what he should do is to apply the method *again*. He would be attacking the unbeliever over and over, until the unbeliever mentions something that he suddenly thinks cannot be attacked, when what he should do is to attack *again*.

You must constantly and consistently apply biblical apologetics to let it bring about what it is supposed to accomplish. There is nothing wrong with the method, which is really an

application of biblical teachings and sound reasoning. However, you must not go "blank" at any point, but you must maintain the pressure on the opponent by continuing to apply biblical teachings and sound reasoning to your debate.

Accordingly, that the unbeliever is oblivious to his defeat does not have to be *your* problem. It is *his* problem, so let him know about it. Make *this* another point of disagreement between you and your opponent. Maintain the pressure; continue the attack. If you have defeated him in debate by biblical wisdom, then his very ignorance or denial of defeat is another "pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5). You can attack it just as you have been attacking any other part of his belief system.

Assuming that you have clearly defeated your opponent, in general you can deal with his refusal to admit defeat just like any other question or objection that he utters, but there are several specific things that you can do to handle this part of the conflict.

First, you should explicitly claim victory. Whatever escape tactic he uses, you should directly oppose and contradict it. This serves to maintain the clash, making it necessary for your opponent to rationally justify his false conclusion that he has reached about the debate. For example, if he says, "Let's just agree to disagree," instead of thinking that this is as far as you can go in the debate, you can respond, "No, I do not agree to disagree. In fact, we will never agree until you change your beliefs and agree with me. For me to agree with you, or to agree to disagree, would be to compromise the very worldview that I have been asserting and defending."

Second, you should summarize for the unbeliever what has logically transpired over the course of the debate. Remind him of how the debate started, of how you successfully defended your worldview against his attacks, of how he failed to defend his worldview against your attacks, and of how the both of you finally arrived at the present point in the dialogue. Explain to him the *rational* basis of why you have won the debate, and remind him that the verdict is decided on the basis of rationality, not his feelings or expectations.

If the unbeliever had boasted of his own rationality and intellectual superiority, remind him of that, and show him that according to a logical analysis and summary of the debate, you have unquestionably defeated him. If he still denies defeat or even claims victory, then demand him to offer an analysis of the debate, summarizing every step and every argument of the dialogue with strict deductive logic. In other words, just as you have defeated him by enforcing logic throughout the debate, even now you can compel him to admit defeat by enforcing logic again.

If the unbeliever wants to "start over," claiming that you have somehow confused him at some point, then you can point out that if he is as rational as he claimed, then this could not have happened. Why does he need to start over if he is so intellectually superior? If he wishes to morph his worldview, you should often let him do it, but you should also first speak out about what is happening, and explicitly note to him and to anyone who is listening that he is backtracking and changing his views. This becomes evidence against

his alleged rationality and intellectual superiority. He is stupid, and that is why he does not know what he should believe. I say that you should let him morph (if there is time), because unless he morphs into the biblical worldview itself (in which case you no longer need to debate him), you will be able to defeat whatever he morphs into, and all his changes will become additional evidence that demonstrates his intellectual incompetence. But you need to keep track of his changes, and then loudly point them out.¹⁹

Third, although you might encounter the same opponent again in a future conversation, unless what happens at this point drags both of you right back into the center of the debate, you have really reached the conclusion of this debate session. Even if you have already done so, and especially if you have not done it enough during the debate, this is the time to make the gospel personal.

You must tell him the implication of his defeat. He entered the debate thinking that he was more rational than you and intellectually superior to you. But over the course of the conversation, you have completely destroyed the alleged rationality of his every non-biblical belief; rather, you have successfully vindicated the rationality of the biblical worldview, and declared to him that valid human reasoning itself is patterned after the Logic and Reason of God, the *logos* in John 1:1. Only Christ can save his soul and his rationality, and if he does not convert, he will remain foolish throughout the remaining portion of his worthless life, which will then end in ultimate futility and horror as God casts him to endless suffering in hell.

You must not give the impression that, by defeating him in debate, you have destroyed a system of thought that is outside of and apart from him. You must not let him think that even if his worldview is destroyed, he himself somehow remains unscathed. Many Christians have done everyone a great disservice by unbiblically separating the sins from the sinners and the heresies from the heretics. No, they are sinners because *they* sin, and they are heretics because *they* believe and teach heresies.

Accordingly, you must never utter some nonsense like, "You know, Pete, I don't think that you are a stupid person. In fact, I think that you are very intelligent, but I have to say that you just happen to believe some stupid things." This is rubbish! No, they believe in those stupid things because *they* are stupid, and that is why *they* need to change. They commit sinful acts because *they* are sinful, and that is why *they* need to repent. This is how you apply the gospel as something that *they* need: You tell them that, apart from Christ, *they* are stupid, sinful, and worthless, but those whom God saves by Christ is given wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:29).

I am not so naïve as to suggest that if you clearly present the rational basis for your claim to victory, then your opponent will surely break down and admit defeat. His heart might

¹⁹ If an opponent is especially prone to backtracking and morphing, then it might be a good idea to write down on paper some of his major premises and arguments during the debate. Or, at certain crucial points during the debate, you may rephrase his assertions and arguments to him and make him confirm them and commit to them. After this, any backtracking and morphing will become more obvious, and it will be easier to point them out to your opponent and to others who are listening to the debate.

be so hardened against truth and reason that he will defy any rational conclusion that does not favor his beliefs, but it is still important for you to declare and explain your victory just to make your presentation complete. This is especially important if there are other people listening to your debate, since like your opponent, many people cannot properly follow a rational discourse, and they might also need your help to realize that you have won. Of course I am not telling you to manipulate their thinking by merely asserting your victory, since I am saying that you must also summarize the debate and explain to them why you have won, retracing the logical steps by which the debate has reached its conclusion in your favor.

CONCLUSION

This concludes our short course on apologetics in conversation. I have shared with you some of my principles for winning. Some of you will perceive their power and proceed to apply them for the glory of God, while others will doubtless be horrified by what appears to them as a harsh and ruthless approach. But consistent with the way that I have been speaking, I will say this to you: Although I ache for everyone to affirm that which is biblical, your approval means nothing to me.

In addition, unless you can biblically defend your objection to my approach, your objection is in itself a "pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God," and which biblical apologetics will refute and destroy. Insofar as what I have written is biblical, your disagreement means defiance against God. You might find my approach offensive, but I find it much more offensive that you oppose Scripture's own assessment of the unbeliever's condition and how we should approach him – that all his thinking is foolish and futile, and that we should tell him about it.

Many years ago, J. Gresham Machen wrote:

Modern preachers are trying to bring men into the Church without requiring them to relinquish their pride; they are trying to help men avoid the conviction of sin. The preacher gets up into the pulpit, opens the Bible, and addresses the congregation somewhat as follows: "You people are very good," he says; "you respond to every appeal that looks toward the welfare of the community. Now we have in the Bible – especially in the life of Jesus – something so good that we believe it is good enough even for you good people." Such is modern preaching. It is heard every Sunday in thousands of pulpits.²⁰

Likewise, the modern apologist says, "You people are very rational; you respond to sound arguments and follow the evidence wherever it leads. Your achievements in science, literature, and all kinds of intellectual disciplines are brilliant and astounding. Now we have in the Bible something so rational that we believe it is rational enough even for you rational people." Such is modern apologetics. But as Machen continues to write in the context of preaching, "It is entirely futile."²¹

Just as the preachers he described were not gospel preachers, the apologists I described are not biblical apologists. Rather, true gospel preaching and real biblical apologetics say, whether or not in these words, "You non-Christians are stupid, sinful, hopeless, and

²⁰ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1923; reprint 2001), p. 68.

²¹ *Ibid.*

worthless; you are unproductive, unprofitable, and ungrateful. You must repent and believe the gospel, and depend on Christ to save you; otherwise, God will condemn you to endless suffering in hell."

There are several reasons why many people are offended and repulsed by such a message.

First, sometimes it is just based on a misunderstanding. I never said that you must be constantly harsh and contentious when preaching the gospel or defending the faith. I am not that way myself. I never said that we should constantly repeat to the unbeliever, "You are stupid, you are sinful, you are worthless." However, the *thought* must be clearly conveyed; otherwise, you would fail to communicate to the unbeliever all that the Bible says about him. In any case, my main emphasis is on spiritual and intellectual hostility, and this kind of hostility does not imply a constant outward social hostility. However, contrary to many people, I do insist that there is a place for this latter kind of hostility, as demonstrated and commanded by Christ, the prophets, and the apostles, and for those who respect them, even the Reformers.

Second, even some professing believers are offended and repulsed because these people are really unbelievers, so of course the gospel produces such a reaction in them. As Peter writes, "Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,' and, 'A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.' They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for" (1 Peter 2:7-8).

Third, even some genuine believers are offended and repulsed by this message, especially when it is clearly expressed and formulated, because they have been indoctrinated by the unbeliever's way of thinking. They are so accustomed and agreeable to the non-Christian standard of proper social discourse (part of which consists of compromise, subtlety, and secrecy) that when biblical teachings are boldly stated in plain words, they are offended and repulsed. In other words, as long as you speak so ambiguously so that not many people can understand you and be offended, they do not mind you telling the truth. But this way of thinking is precisely one of those things that would set itself up against the knowledge of Christ, and thus it is precisely one of those things that we must demolish for the glory of Christ.

There is much more that I *can* say about apologetics, but to teach you how to vindicate the biblical worldview and to defeat every unbeliever in argumentation, there is nothing more that I *must* say, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength" (1 Corinthians 1:25). In our intellectual conflict with the unbelievers, it does not take much to be invincible – the question is whether we will be faithful to put on the mind of Christ and proclaim the wisdom of God.